
Carcase for Hounds

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*Let's kill him boldly but not wrathfully,
Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods.
Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds.*

Julius Caesar (William Shakespeare)

The ground was wet underfoot. The two men kept away from all beaten tracks to avoid leaving prints. The smaller of the two was leading, his 1913 Winchester carbine slung by a leather thong over his right shoulder. In his left hand he carried a deerskin bag. The long, stringy hair fell to his shoulders over the tattered dark greatcoat. At the bottom of his baggy, ragged trousers, so that they seemed to peer out from under them, were his oversized army boots, lashed to the small feet with leather thongs. The trousers were held in place round the waist by a leather cord.

His companion was an immense, huge man, over six feet of tough muscle and bone. The massive chest was covered by a khaki shirt and an old jungle-jacket. He wore a patched-up pair of trousers and very old jungle-boots. On his large head, covering it so that the long hair flowed out from under it in pigtails, was a black cap that had once belonged to a police officer. The police officer had lost his head and no longer needed the cap. In place of the police crown now was a badge of vertical green strips of cloth alternating with white ones. At his hip in a deerskin holster he had a large Smith and Wesson revolver acquired from a white farmer, the victim of one of the dreaded Haraka swoops, out at Timau. Hanging from the right shoulder on an oily leather sling was a dark sinister British Patchett. Like his comrade, the bigger man carried a skin bag on his back.

Mist hung thick and low in the jungle. Visibility was reduced to only a few yards in any direction. The cold morning wind had died down and now a humid warmth enveloped the wet undergrowth. Birds twittered softly, timidly in their nests, afraid to venture yet into the misty, late morning. And in the sleepy

surroundings even the giant jungle trees seemed to have taken a nap.

Nothing was said between the two men. The small one led the way over the wet earth and through the dewy bushes. The big one followed a step behind. All movements were made softly. Hardly a bush was stirred enough to be heard more than a few feet away. They did not pause to check their bearings. The mist got thicker as they approached Liki River. They descended the sloping ground on the northern bank.

Through the foliage they could just make out the muddy overflow of the river as it frothed and shook the bushes on the bank. They stopped three yards from the raging fury. The small man put down his bag and went down on one knee to peer at the river and the jungle on the other side. The big one looked round once, his trained eyes squinting into the cloudy bush. Then he too laid his bag down, next to that of his friend, and sat on his haunches.

‘I don’t like this,’ the smaller man said, almost to himself.

‘We have forded it this high before,’ the big one observed, parting the leaves with the barrel of his Patchett and peering.

‘It will not be like this on our way back.’ The small man looked up and down river. ‘It is still raining up on the mountain.’

His companion took off the black cap and shook it, rubbing away the dewdrops.

‘The message said today,’ he reminded the other.

‘And in this weather!’ The little man shook his head.

The big man seemed to think, patting his thick bushy moustache.

‘We have got to talk to them,’ he said quietly.

The other murmured doubtful agreement.

‘We must know what they think of us in the capital,’ he went on.

The other nodded again. ‘And there are those traps to check.’ He spoke almost regretfully.

‘How many do we have across there?’ The big one turned to the little one.

The other thought.

‘We laid four yesterday,’ he replied. ‘Three of them are useless. They have not caught a deer for five days.’

'We will check just the one,' the big man stated.

'That one is too close to the village. Only a stone's throw from the road.'

'You laid it there.'

They turned their attention to the bags. Blood seeped out of the smaller sack. The little deer had still been warm in the snare when they collected it.

'We shall leave these here,' the tall one said of the sacks.

He extracted the animal from the smaller bag. On the dewy grass its body glistened a dark handsome grey, its large clear eyes wide open in death. A lithe blue-black tongue came twisted out of the small mouth. The head lay crooked, a crimson welt running round the thin graceful neck where the wire trap had tightened.

He stuffed the animal back into the bag and stood up.

'Hide that somewhere,' he told his partner.

Still on his haunches, the other glanced up at him. Then he looked across the river and shook his head. He was still shaking his head when he stood up and heaved the sacks to his shoulder. He walked into the mist. When he came back he had only the rifle in his hands.

'I still think ...' he tried to say.

The big man turned towards the river. He followed. At the bank they stopped. The big one looked from behind a tree, up river, as far as it was possible to look in the semi-darkness. He scanned the downstream direction next. Nothing moved. He checked upriver again. Still nothing suspicious. He turned to the other man.

'You cross first,' he told him. I will cover you.'

He readied his Patchett. But the smaller one held back and shook his head.

'No,' he said. 'You go first.' He nodded across the river. I will cover.'

The big one shrugged. He buried his machete deeper into the scabbard round his waist. The spare magazines in his trousers were secure. His revolver holster was tight. He turned round and glanced across again, one sweeping glance that took in everything. He slipped on the safety-catch of the Patchett and cautiously slid into the stream. The water was as cold as only the Liki can

get during the floods. It whirled furiously round him, lapping coldly at his waist, trying to wrestle him off balance. Holding his machine-gun above his head he inched forward, feeling the floor of the river with his feet and fighting not to be swept off his balance. In the middle the river bed was deeper, the current stronger. Fighting against it proved a hopeless endeavour. He turned downstream at an angle and swam, one-handed powerful strokes that yanked him through the strongest of the currents. Once across he swiftly withdrew the safety-catch, merged into the jungle and waited breathlessly, listening. No strange sound broke the monotonous roar of the Liki. He crept upstream to a point where he could watch his friend cross.

The little one was waiting, half concealed. The big one waved, and prepared to catch the Winchester. The little one pushed the bush to one side to make room. Then he looked up and down the river once more. Holding the rifle by the barrel, he swung it in a circling motion and sent it sailing across the river. The other watched it come and lunged for it. The rifle slid through his hand. The sling caught on a small branch and held the rifle swaying above the frothing water for one breathless moment. Just as the branch gave under the weight one big hand grabbed the sling and retrieved the gun. The little man waded into the cold river and swam across. The big one was waiting for him, the rifle in his outstretched arm.

'Let's go,' he said.

The little one once more led the way. The big one followed.

They came to the snare shortly after leaving the Liki. It had apparently caught some animal that had slipped the snare and got away. The ground in the vicinity was trampled and torn up. The lucky animal was nowhere around. The little man reset the trap without any ceremony and they went on.

The afternoon wind woke up. The bush rustled. The mist was clearing and it was getting colder. The afternoon showers were not very far away. And they had to beat the showers back to the Liki if they were to rejoin the gang that night. They hurried further south for the rendezvous.

They approached the meeting-place slowly, warily. For a moment they lay concealed. They watched the vicinity of the giant fig. Then while the big one kept watch, the little one crept

into the undergrowth under the fig. A big black bird, scared out of its sanctuary, went screaming to the west. The big watcher saw only a dark-grey shape hurtling away in the mist. Then his little companion materialized next to him, shaking his head negatively.

'No message?' The big man asked.

'Nothing,' the other answered.

He appeared to think.

'You searched well?'

'All over.'

The big one caressed his moustache, pulling the long ends out gently, while his eyes searched for an explanation in the mist.

'Kimamo,' he called suddenly, as though from far off, his voice low, thoughtful and slightly tinged with uncertainty.

'Yes, general.' The small man looked up at the dark, wrinkled brow as though to read what was going on behind it. 'What do you think?' the general asked.

The other shook his head.

'I don't know ... maybe...' he shrugged.

'Maybe what?' The general went on searching in the mist.

'I don't know.' Kimamo glanced round nervously.

The drizzle came falling lightly, little silver droplets.

'Maybe they are late,' Kimamo said.

'They should have been waiting.'

'Maybe they will come tomorrow, general.'

'Weru said today.' He spoke slowly, quietly.

'Maybe ...' Kimamo began.

'Maybe everything,' the general interrupted.

He turned to look at the lieutenant.

'We shall wait,' he told him.

Kimamo squinted up through the drizzle at the dark sky. 'The storm, general,' he reminded him.

The general watched an ugly half-rotten leaf glide lightly down and settle down on the lieutenant's thick silver-sprinkled hair. He brushed it away.

'We shall wait,' he repeated, wringing his cold, large hands.

They squeezed under the wet cover of a thicket and stood watching the fig-tree. They waited in silence, watching and listening to the forest. The trained ears sorted out the noises, a roosting bird, a cracking branch, leaves falling all over and the

silent rhythm of the showers.

They heard the approach from far off. They glanced at one another and waited, guns ready. The man came out of the mist, heading for the fig-tree. They watched him quietly as he vanished into the scrub. Shortly he reappeared, looked around and went back. The general nudged the lieutenant and nodded in that direction. As Kimamo crept after the man, the general changed position and waited. The two men came out of the cover and joined him. Weru stopped in front of the general, a nervous middle-aged little man. Raindrops glanced off his balding pate.

'You are late, Weru,' the general said.

They shook hands.

'It is the soldiers,' Weru told him. 'They were all over the place and it was hard to slip past the guards at the gate.' 'The soldiers?' the general asked. 'They have left now, they were so many.' 'And the chief?'

'He begins to breathe again. He hardly shows his face when they are in the village. His home-guards too. They are all so scared of the white soldiers. The Kapteni was there too.'

The general remembered the D.C., now Captain Kingsley, with distaste. He wished he had killed the white man when he had the chance, when the dog lay unconscious at his feet.

'He is still the same, that captain.' The messenger looked disgusted.

'All over the village, as though he was still the D.C. And the chief thinks the white man is a god.'

There was a pregnant pause. The drizzle fell and increased slightly. The messenger fidgeted uneasily. The general took time over the all-important question.

'Well?' he said finally.

Weru shook his head.

'They did not come.' He could not meet the other's eyes. The general watched him quietly, gave him time to pull himself together.

'I got word last night.' Weru looked from the general to the lieutenant. 'It is very bad.'

'What?' Kimamo asked him.

'There was a big sweep in Nairobi,' Weru told him. 'Most of the top organizers were taken to jail. And there are many more

white soldiers arriving in the capital. It is very bad in Nairobi.'

The general took off his cap and patted the long hair underneath.

'The arms?' he asked.

'No word about those,' Weru answered.

The general replaced the cap.

'The fighting is heavy in the south,' Weru told him. 'And it is very bad on the Aberdares.'

The general glared into the misty rain, his face darker in concentrated thought. The others watched him apprehensively.

'Arms are what we want,' he said. 'Many guns and ammunition.'

Suddenly the rain started slackening, the first indication of its drying off.

'Ammunition,' he repeated.

Weru dug into his greatcoat. Then he extended his hand to the general.

'I brought you these,' he said.

The others looked down on the hand and the four sickly, dark copper .303's. With luck those were four white soldiers lying copper-dead on nervous little Weru's palm. Four white soldiers, and there were hundreds, thousands more arriving at the capital from overseas!

The general picked up the shells one by one. He placed them in the jungle-jacket and zipped the pocket shut. He thought: if every villager brought four shells, there would be two or three hundred white soldiers eliminated. And then ... and then hundreds, thousands more would fly into the capital from overseas.

'Take these too,' Weru said. 'I got them from Bwana Jackson's house.'

The general took the parcel, in its waterproof wrappings. He unwrapped it slowly and looked in. A packet of sugar, a packet of coffee, and something that fell out. Weru quickly bent down and picked up the two white tablets.

'They are good for a cold,' he said, handing them over. 'Swans, Jackson uses them all the time.'

The general took back the thick tablets and put them with the others. He turned to Weru.

'Let me know if you get word from the capital.'

Weru nodded nervously.

'Go well,' the general dismissed him.

He turned to go, then stopped.

'But, general ...' He dried up.

As the general watched him he started trembling all over, his face clouded with fear and anxiety. 'I can't, general ... I can't.'

'Can't what?'

'Go on meeting you like this every week, general,' he cried 'It seems they know all about us. Simba is becoming suspicious. They will kill me. Please get somebody else, another messenger please.'

The general watched in silence.

Weru wrung his hands, licking his lips.

'I can't come and see you again,' he moaned.

The general sighed deep and low, his eyes narrowed into mean little slits.

'Think of my wife and children, Haraka.'

In his mind General Haraka saw a team of rugged little offspring with running noses playing in the mud outside a cold hut while their mothers fetched firewood and drew water for the chief and his homeguards. And their fathers, they were out somewhere in the rainy forest felling timber under armed guard.

He handed Weru's parcel to Kimamo.

'Please let me stay away, please!'

'We must know what is happening in the capital,' the general said calmly.

Weru twisted his little fingers.

'You are the only one they can contact,' the general told him. Kimamo shifted his feet.

'Let's go,' the general said as if from afar, scratching his long beard absently.

They trekked north into the misty forest towards the overflowing Liki River. Weru was left helplessly transfixed, staring into the drizzle after them, too scared to move. His black greatcoat clung to him, uncomfortably soggy, cold and smelling strongly of sweat.

Captain Kingsley's Land-Rover drew into camp way ahead of the rest of the convoy, showing signs of having had a damaging drive. Mud covered the green vehicle up to the windshield, which had been very unsuccessfully cleaned with wet leaves. The late afternoon sun broke through the dull atmosphere and

shone fresh and strong, raising steam all over the camp and on the grass airstrip. The Kenya Regiment Special Operations' standard moved soggily, reluctantly, in the warm, weak breeze.

The Land-Rover pulled up at the officers' mess. The captain dragged his big frame on to the gravel drive, stretched his tired, long legs and yawned.

'Home at last,' he said to the driver.

'At last,' the driver shrugged.

'Goddamn mountain roads.'

'Can be the devil himself in the rains.' The driver rubbed tired blue eyes.

The captain reached into the back of the vehicle and heaved out his sleeping-bag and kit.

'One week up there's like years,' he observed.

The driver handed him the automatic rifle from the rack behind the seats.

'Thanks.' He took the two unused magazines from the dashboard and stuffed them into the dark brown and green jungle-jacket. 'Bye.'

'Have a good rest, sir,' the driver said, throwing the vehicle into reverse gear.

'Wish I could,' he murmured.

The Land-Rover sped back towards the personnel transport section of the barracks.

Captain Kingsley glanced round the peaceful camp before heaving his pack on to his back and walking up the steps to the verandah. It felt good being back in the shelter of the mess with its clean smell of soap and disinfectant. He hummed softly as he climbed the stairs leading to the sleeping-quarters. But for some soft whistling from down the corridor the place was quiet. He leaned the rifle on the wall by his door, dropped the sleeping-bag tiredly and proceeded to remove the muddy jungle-boots, still wet from shoving and dragging at stalled three-tonners.

Down the corridor, a door banged shut. The whistler came marching firmly along, working his lips vigorously in a marching tune.

'Just got back?' he stopped to ask.

'Yeah.' The captain pulled off his right boot.

'Had a rough time?'

'Worse than most.'

'Bagged many bandits?'

'None.'

Pause.

'Any encounters?'

'No encounters.'

'What did you do all this time?'

'When the rain allowed and the muck let go our wheels, we searched around for Haraka and his blasted Mau Mau.' He tugged impatiently at a muddy, stubborn lace. 'How long this stretch?' the other officer asked him. 'One lousy long week.' The other nodded:

'Long time. Haraka may have taken a holiday,' he sniggered. The other laughed.

'Cheeky bastard,' the captain said, speaking of the general. A stuffy silence. 'You look beat.'

The captain looked up at the fellow officer, clean in a freshly ironed aircraft-engineer's uniform.

'I feel beat,' he told him, 'What's new around here?' 'The bloody rain.'

'Rain is in the jungle.' He went back to the sodden boot. Then he looked up suddenly:

'Did you ever dream you were the captain of a batch of miserable soldiers trying to make progress up a mountain road by shovelling fully loaded three-tonners out of two feet of soft mud in pouring rain?'

'Before I joined the air force,' the other said.

'I should have joined the navy.'

'When are you going back hunting?' The aircraft engineer leaned

on the wall.

'After you.'

The engineer laughed.

'That will be a long time to come,' he said. 'We are getting two more Ansons next week.'

'Maybe you boys are going to get to be really useful then,' Captain Kingsley said. 'Get up there on the mountain and bomb the sick terrorists out.'

He pulled off the boot and dropped it next to its partner.

'Now for a heavenly hot bath.' He pushed the door to his room open. 'So long.'

'See you in the mess.' The other marched off.

The captain stacked his gun and pack in a corner of the room. He proceeded to undress and take a bath. In a few moments he stood at the window, clean, changed and feeling renewed. He lit a Rex and looked out at the airstrip and the camp buildings.

The rugged windsock rose and fell lazily. Aircraft of various types were assembled near the large hangars. Men were busy refuelling while repair-work went on inside the hangars.

As he watched, a light plane, the property of the Kenya Police Reserve Air Wing, touched down, went skid-bump on the runway and taxied. An aviation tanker came into view in the direction of the fuel depots behind the workshops.

Beyond the runway the plains rolled for miles towards the Aberdares. The dominating acacias were green and healthy in the wet grassland. A little to the east, a deep green carpet that stretched beyond view to the north. All this land was the property of farmer Anderson of Acacia Ranch. The sun smiled benevolently warm on the land. The Aberdares Range looked like a gentle giant to the south. The captain knew better. The range and its muddy forest roads, the jungle and the terrorists therein were anything but gentle.

He turned round, picked up his rifle and leftover ammunition and walked out of the room. He deposited the gun at the armoury. Then he picked his way through the paved paths between neatly trimmed dwarf flowers to his office. The room was stuffy, the air heavily laden with cigarette smoke. He shut the door and opened the window behind the desk. It opened on a view of the camp's main gate. Beyond the gates, the guardroom and the engulfing Acacia Ranch the land rose slowly towards the stormy Mount Kenya. Rain clouds hung dark and low, covering the snowy peak and most of the forest. A gentle, warm gust of air caressed his face and shook the loose corner of the map of Laikipia District. The grey wall of the office bore the ubiquitous framed portrait of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

He got into the seat behind the desk and crushed the cigarette end on the glass ashtray. The out tray was empty. The in tray was overflowing with correspondence. He sorted out official

and personal mail into separate bundles. Most of the personal letters were from relatives. The official letters were mostly from the various sections of the camp; one was from the Emergency Council.

The council was, quite naturally it claimed, enraged by the continued existence of apparently strong terrorist insurgents in and around Laikipia District, his own area. In the council's opinion he was taking too long over his assigned job. And exactly how far had he got towards the annihilation of the murderer Haraka and his band of cut-throats?

The captain went through the rest of the letter. The way the Emergency Council saw it, Operation Haraka was nice and easy. Almost as though all one had to do was just go out into the jungle and invite him out of hiding.

As the captain watched, the rest of the convoy came in, all muddy and exhausted. The three-tonners were red with mountain dirt, their short Bedford snouts wearing rugged, discouraged frowns. The troopers on them looked worse.

The captain felt embittered against the council and its haste for results. When would the old geezers wake up to the grim reality of the manhunt, the bloody jungle and the goddamn rain?

He swivelled round to face the room, rolling his head in distaste. The monotony of the grey walls hurt his sense of beauty. The office needed repainting. He rubbed the tired red eyes. He picked up the personal letters and headed for the door. The telephone rang. He came back and picked it up.

'Captain Kingsley speaking.'

'At last!'

Of all the bad news! It was the CO., Brigadier Thames.

'I got back less than an hour ago, sir,' he explained.

'How was it?'

'Bad. Very bad.'

'Anybody hurt?'

For once he sounded concerned.

'Oh, no, it's the weather, sir.'

'I see.' A pause, then: 'Any luck, any action?'

'No contact whatsoever,' the captain told him.

'Haraka must be somewhere up there,' the CO. observed.

The captain got back behind the desk.

'We worked fifteen miles north of the Liki from Timau. Three miles in the jungle along the ridge. No sign of him or anybody.'

'There couldn't have been,' the other said, in a matter-of-fact way.

'What's that?' the captain asked.

'It's this. While you were up north looking for him, Haraka was down south at Naromoru. Mr Whitney of Springbok farm was murdered together with his family last night. They set the house on fire too.'

Captain Kingsley caught his breath.

'Somebody has got to put an end to this carnage, captain.'

'I will do my best, sir.'

'I am glad to hear that.'

There was a slight pause before the brigadier exploded as though with renewed energy:

'There has been a lot of positive action on the Aberdare Sector. The report is that there is a mass exodus towards the Mount Kenya Sector. This is causing concern. The Aberdare bands must not contact Haraka and his men. The result could be disastrous.'

Captain Kingsley sighed.

'Very explosive.'

'The plan being to attack the various gangs in isolation. Troops have moved in to close the escape route. Some might just slip through. They are running all over B Sector and dying in considerable numbers.'

The captain had a feeling that this was not being disclosed to him for its information value.

'Only your Sector A remains undisturbed, captain,' the CO. told him next.

He nodded and waited for the bombshell. 'What do you say to that?' he was asked. He shrugged.

'Well,' he said lamely, 'we have done our best, but Haraka is an immensely rough character. Very elusive. But given time we will get him, all right.'

There was dead silence for a time on the other end of the wire. 'Better be soon,' the brigadier said.

The captain clenched his teeth. Everybody rushing; rushing, rushing. Rushing in the offices where there were no stumbling

blocks and no forest. They should have tried rushing a convoy of three-tonners through the mountain storms.

'By the way,' the voice suddenly jolted him back.

He came to attention.

'There has been a change in Operation Haraka.' 'Oh, no, not again!' he moaned through closed teeth. 'There is a general meeting to this effect tomorrow,' the voice on the phone told him.

Another miserable pause.

'Not very great changes, though,' the CO. went on.

He said nothing. He gripped the telephone hard and stared into the air, his dark eyebrows twisted. Then came the bombshell:

'Do you still think you can handle this operation?' The brigadier sounded indifferent.

'Of course, sir,' was all he could say.

A moment of silence followed.

'Carry it to successful completion?'

The captain swallowed.

'If anybody can get Haraka,' his voice came slow and tormented, 'I can.'

The other man cleared his voice. 'That is what I think, too.' He sounded insincere. 'Thank you, sir,' the captain replied, all the same. 'Unfortunately, the Emergency Council does not think so,' the brigadier informed him. 'They think you have been licked. Remember they entrusted the job to you on account of your knowing the bandit well; send a thief to catch a thief,' he laughed.

The captain did not see the joke. He nodded, dazed.

He remembered the Haraka he knew, a brawny giant with cunning, calm eyes that seemed to hide all feeling. A calm chief, until that one time in the chief's office when the devil had dared strike back at him, a District Commissioner.

'He is not the same Haraka anymore,' he said.

'That should not stop you capturing the bandit.'

'No. I need time to do it. Enough time.'

'The E.C. think they have given you enough of that.'

He shook his head.

The voice on the phone came back:

'They ... they think it was a mistake picking you, you know what I mean, your taking so long over the assignment.'

'But you know Haraka is not like the others,' he protested. 'He is slippery and ... well...'

'I understand,' the CO. said. 'But the people to make understand is the E.C. They are all for handing over the project to Major Jones, you know, the bloke from Sector B. Well, we have to agree he has more than proved himself on the Aberdares clean-up. So,' another pause accompanied by an official heavy sigh, 'so they want him on Operation Haraka.'

Captain Kingsley's body felt numb, his breath coming out slowly, painfully.

'This is unfair,' he crackled.

'I don't know,' non-committally.

Pause.

'Do you really think you can handle this thing?' 'But of course.'

'Well then,' the other said, 'I have talked the E.C. into giving you another chance.'

The captain sighed, relieved.

'Thank you, sir.'

'You understand this is the very last chance.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'Don't let me down.'

The captain swallowed.

'I promise.'

'Hold your head up high at the conference tomorrow. At ten-thirty. I will dispatch the agenda straight away.'

The captain sighed again.

'Thank you.'

The next official pause was so long the captain was about to hang up. Then:

'Haraka must be somewhere up there.'

Captain Kingsley turned to view the dark, stormy Mount Kenya jungle that harboured the terrorists.

'Yes,' he said quietly.

'What was that?'

'I said he must be somewhere up there.'

'Yes,' the other agreed. 'He must be. And he must die in isolation.' The captain said nothing.

'Soon,' the CO. said finally. 'Bye-bye, captain.'

The phone clicked dead.

The dead phone still to his ear, the captain went on staring out at the distant forest. He saw a blurred vision of Haraka, darkness, mud and Brigadier Thames, all merged in a misty, rainy jungle. He turned round, replaced the receiver and brought his fist down hard on the table top, his teeth bared aggressively.

'Damn the murderers,' he cursed.

Leaning back, he lit another Rex. He dropped the silver petrol lighter on the table and walked to the wall map. He studied it for the millionth time. It was still the same:

Rivers Liki and Nanyuki passed through the sixteen-square-mile town not more than two miles apart at their widest distance from each other. They meandered down the slopes of Mount Kenya, out of the cold, dark jungles, through Nanyuki town and into the plains, combining fourteen miles later to pour into the Uaso-Nyiro. The land between them included the Pinewood Forest Station and Gathiuru Saw Mills in the forest area. The two villages were connected to the town by a dirt road that became virtually impassable during the rains.

Two main roads cut the town into four parts. The great north road from Nairobi ran due north across the Liki to Timau and Moyale in the end north. The Thomson Falls road started from the luxurious Mawingo Hotel seven miles from town and crossed the Nanyuki, running west into the savannah. The road passed through the 7th K.A.R. camp, through the enormous golf course, through the plush Asian quarters and the monstrous fenced-in mud and tin shanty, Majengo, before running west through Acacia Ranch into the flatlands.

The captain dragged another deep puff from the cigarette and studied the map more to the north.

The district in that direction was taken up by white settlers' farms. Timau Police Station protected the farms from terrorist attacks, and – he shook his head – did so poorly. South of Nanyuki town, the railway line snaked its winding path from Nairobi. A siding from the town served the airfield and the Kenya Regiment stationed there.

He stepped back to view the whole. Mount Kenya loomed protectively over the town. The Oldaiga Hills guarded the north-west approach. A respectable distance to the south-west the

Aberdares Range lay asleep in isolation. Thousands of streamlets flowed through the Mount Kenya forest and combined into rivulets such as Naromoru and Timau, which either ran themselves dry in the thorn-tree-covered Laikipia Plains or combined and formed tributaries to the Liki and the Nanyuki.

A sigh escaped the captain. He dragged his exhausted body back to the desk and dropped down on the seat. He tossed the cigarette end out of the window to the wet flower gardens. The Mount Kenya forest was ugly with storm. How the devil did the notorious Haraka live through that? The thought of the ex-chief eluding and, to all appearances, outwitting him was most hurtful. And the wretched Brigadier Thames always on his back, tormenting him:

‘... the very last chance.’

2

The forest was alive. A cold wind, the harbinger of heavy rains, whistled through the treetops, shaking even the giant figs to the tips of their roots. Rainbirds called a wet message through the cold, almost dark forest. The doves cooed in their nests, preparing to meet the storm. The cicadas sounded harsh and terrified.

The two men, one small, one big, walked carefully, picking their way among the giant creepers that covered the jungle floor. The small one had a 1913 Winchester carbine in one hand and a deerskin bag in the other. The bigger man carried a Patchett. They walked quietly, the small one leading, the big one following. Hardly a word was said between them. Up in the trees above them the gales raged on, lashing at the branches and shaking the jungle ceiling.

They came to a slight rise in the terrain, the first line of bamboo vegetation. It was thick and apparently impenetrable. The little man walked into the bamboo as one would walk through a bead curtain. The big one followed without as much as a pause. It was warm and dark in contrast to the cold of the jungle trees. They could hardly see more than a few feet ahead but that was enough. The small traveller knew the way well in the bamboo thicket and the big one could follow. Some distance into the bush they came to the hideout.

It was a large cleared area made so that while there were no encumbering bamboo posts in the middle, the bamboo leaned inwards, meeting at the top to form an almost rainproof roof. The main compound had three large huts. It was like a small village well lit by sunlight filtering through the roof. A few men stood

sentry duty on the fringes of the camp, armed with Italian rifles and a few Winchesters.

They stopped at the edge of the hideout. 'Kimamo,' General Haraka turned to face him.

'Yes, General.'

'What do you think?'

'About what, General?'

'About Weru.'

'He must have been too afraid of the chief to meet us.'

There was silence. Camp life dragged on. Sentries threw quick, concealed glances at the two.

'I never gave him leave to stay away.'

Kimamo nodded.

'Maybe he was arrested,' he said.

'Maybe killed,' the general said quietly.

'He was very scared last time we met him,' Kimamo said.

The general rubbed his beard in thought.

'Kimamo,' he said again.

'Yes.'

'We need ammunition,' Kimamo nodded, thinking. 'We need more men, too.' 'Yes, General.' 'We must have them soon.' Kimamo shrugged.

'Maybe Weru will come next week,' he said.

'Forget about Weru. Weru will not come next week or the next. Weru will never come again.'

Birds called in the stormy jungle below.

'And we have got to have the arms,' Kimamo said.

A man came from one of the huts. He was the same size as Kimamo and strutted when he walked. Otherwise he was just like the other two in appearance. He stopped in front of General Haraka.

'All is well, Nguru?' Haraka asked him.

'All is well,' the man nodded.

The general looked round the hideout, studying the bored sentries.

'Are all the trappers back?' he asked.

'Numbers two and four platoons just came in,' the lieutenant answered.

Haraka unslung the bag from his shoulder and handed it to Nguru.

'The rest?' he demanded.

'The food collectors are still out. One went to Ontulele Forest Station. The other went to Gathiuru. It is a long way to these places.'

'I know,' the general said.

'Did the messengers from the capital come?' Nguru asked him.

He shook his head and said nothing.

Kimamo went off to a hut and entered it.

Nguru watched him go, then looked back to the general, his face clouded with anxiety.

'What happened, General?' he asked.

'Nothing.' Haraka looked down. 'Weru did not show up.'

Nguru's face darkened.

The general placed a hand on his shoulder:

'Don't worry, all will be well. We shall have the arms. Soon.'

'But ...'

'We shall get them.' He stared into the distance. 'Somehow.'

He left a confused Nguru holding an empty collecting bag and strode heavily across the compound to his hut. At one end was his camp bed, with its animal-hide mattress. Folded neatly at the head of the bed was a single blanket. The fireplace in the centre of the hut was cold and stumps of half-burned bamboo neatly surrounded the black hole the fire had eaten out the night before. A machete and a hunting knife hung in their sheathes on the wall, above two steel cases.

He walked over to the steel cases, unslinging the submachine-gun from his shoulder. He sat on one of the cases and laid the gun on his lap. From the other case he got out an oily rag and a can of gun oil. He laid them by the case, closed it and placed his foot on it. He next yanked off the magazine and proceeded to dismantle the Patchett, slowly and methodically. His movements were smooth, experienced. His mind meanwhile explored deeper levels. One second he was looking down the barrel of his gun, the other second into the face of the chief, Chief Simba. His hands gripped harder, intending to hurt his enemy. The rubbing motion was coarse and bitter. His eyes bit into the gun, and through it he was transported to the Pinewood Forest Station and the Chief. He

travelled way back to the times gone by. And in the vision he did not see the khaki-garbed chief, but a little effeminate weakling of a boy with a running nose and a vacant, scared expression.

He thought back to the time when he was not a general, not General Haraka, but simply Maguru, Maguru son of Nyaga. And the chief, he was no chief but merely Kahuru son of Wamai. Haraka then thought further back to the time they first met at the forest station, when it was first started. Their families came from different parts of the country to work for Mr Jackson, clearing the jungle and planting trees. The two young men were no more than fifteen.

There was no chief in the village then. The treemen were organized by a foreman under the Forest Officer, Mr Jackson. As the village grew it knit into a vast family of over thirty families. The younger generation formed a society of their own. This was split into sections of adolescent gangs, each led by a self-appointed youth able to dominate the others. They stole green maize from their parents' gardens and raped village maidens in hordes.

Maguru and Kahuru had each led one such gang. Together they had traversed the youthful years to the village primary school and gone out to work for Mr Jackson and his trees.

He remembered back to the time he headed the village security police before becoming the first chief of Pinewood Forest Station. That was before the Emergency and the curfew and the forest fighters were heard of.

Kimamo came into the general's hut, paused at the entrance, then tried to retreat.

'What is it?' Haraka asked without looking up.

Kimamo stopped, hesitated.

'Nothing.'

That was Kimamo, always reluctant to interrupt.

'What did you want?'

He stopped, his hand on the door frame.

'Nothing much.'

'Take it, then.'

He came back to the general. 'I wanted some ammunition.'

The general removed his foot from the steel case and went on with his cleaning.

Kimamo opened it, took a handful of .303s and went out.

Haraka sighed. Kimamo, so reliable. It was he who had persuaded Nguru and the others to flee to the forest with him. It was Kimamo too who had urged him to meet the forest fighters in old Mwaniki's hut. And there he had met the little leader and his band. A small ragged man, not distinguishable at all from his gang of gaunt-faced men. He was a good fighter, though. All that talk about land, freedom fighting and all. And about the others across to the south. And about the capital and the organizers. Where had the little man learned that? And about white men and their thieving ways?

It was this talk that had turned Haraka the chief into a militant anti-white. Thus he had let the forest fighters come and go in his village during curfew hours in spite of the D.C.'s orders to shoot them on sight.

That was very much like District Commissioner Kingsley. Always pushing him around. Haraka remembered well when the white man struck him. It came as a resounding surprise, right across his face and into his heart. Though he was stunned, his reaction was quick. Spontaneous. He struck back a blow full of hate and distaste and protest against oppression. The D.C. collapsed and lay unmoving on the dusty floor of the office. For a second, a surge of well-being, of satisfied revenge, flooded him so that he stood rooted to the spot. Then a splinter of fear wedged its way into his mind. Had he killed him? No, the man was only unconscious. Then the magnitude of his crime sank in. Striking a white man was unheard of. Striking a District Commissioner senseless was unthinkable. The other white men would surely take revenge. An affront to the Queen! They might even shoot him.

Maguru had to flee before the D.C. recovered consciousness. He urgently consulted his faithful home-guards, Kimamo, Muraya and Nguru. They were sad at his action, but agreed that he could no longer safely stay in the village. He had to run. Where to? Naturally into the forest, to the little terrorist leader. But they would not let him go alone. They did not want to remain behind. He failed to dissuade them. They took their rifles, a large stock of spare ammunition, clothes and blankets, and left. They

vanished into the creepy jungle without a word to anyone, not even to his father, old Nyaga. They just left.

Kahuru Wamai, only a home-guard then, had his greatest ambition fulfilled, a face-to-face consultation with the great white god himself, the most high District Commissioner. He talked with great zeal and exposed every single terrorist collaborator in the village. He handed out their names and added a few of his personal enemies to the list for good measure. He praised and exalted the white D.C. and in return became the chief of Pinewood Forest Station. Chief Kahuru Wamai, the most powerful Simba, second only to D.C. Kingsley himself and third to the Queen. He had a rifle, an army of home-guards and a helmet with a crown. The crown had a lion on it, two lions, that could tear all his enemies into little pieces and eat them up. He was the lion himself. Overnight he had become the most feared Simba.

The little terrorist leader was overjoyed to have Maguru in the gang. Though they had by his desertion lost their former contact with the village they could now fight more effectively. He assured Maguru they were not alone. They had a lot of support in the capital and throughout the country. They would soon win. They were not alone.

The D.C.'s reprisals in the village included the arrest and detention of Maguru's and his followers' families. Soon after that D.C. Kingsley left his office and became Captain Kingsley.

General Haraka shook his head at the thought. It was this same Captain Kingsley and his men that had killed the little terrorist general, plunging him, Maguru Nyaga, into the turbulent task of gang leadership. And now the ex-D.C. was all over the place, hunting him down. From the jungle to the plains to the farms, the hunter did not seem to tire. And now without ammunition for the fight for freedom, the tide was likely to turn unfavourably.

Would anything really come from the others? Why had they made no reply to his request for aid? General Haraka shook his head in tolerant disappointment.

He finished cleaning the revolver and clocked the trigger twice to test the action. It was tough, smooth and deadly. He reloaded it and slid it back into its holster. He threw the cleaning rag and

can of oil back into the steel case and shut it. It was getting dark outside. He stood just outside the door:

‘Nguru.’

The lieutenant emerged from a hut and came over.

The general looked round the camp.

‘Assemble the men,’ he commanded. ‘We are moving.’

‘Moving?’ Nguru gaped. ‘Where?’

‘Do what I said,’ the general ordered.

Nguru moved off, faced with the task of organizing the gang for movement. He seemed so confused by the order that he was practically screaming at the fighters.

General Haraka watched him and shook his head. Nguru was a very poor apology for a leader. Always shouting at the men and riding them. A really sad example of a lieutenant. Kimamo was the man. Hard, brave, commanding and yet understanding. He could keep the fighters in a group, and that was the aim for survival. Kimamo was made purely of officer material. Just what a general, any general wanted. He wished he had a hundred Kimamos. The settlers would hear more about him. They surely would.

When the men were assembled in files in front of the general he inspected them. At the mention of the word ‘move’ they always got the message. The carriers packed their loads of food and other gang belongings. The other fighters took their guns, spare ammunition and any personal belongings. Fires were put out and all traces of them erased. All the unnecessary baggage, including the general’s camp-bed and steel cases, were hidden in the bamboo where they could be retrieved on the return to camp. The fighters knew very well that when Haraka said move, it was move with no tags. Their very lives depended on how fast they could execute that simple manoeuvre. Now they were ready and waiting for the next order. And as usual the general took time, his time.

‘Muraya,’ he called his brother.

The man stepped forward.

‘Njogu,’ he called next.

Njogu stepped forward, his Winchester in hand. ‘Maina,’ the general then called. The three men stood in front of him, waiting. ‘You three remain here,’ he told them. ‘When the other platoons

return, come with them to Acacia.' The three men stayed quiet. 'The rest follow me,' he ended.

In two files the eighty-man army followed the general out of the warm bamboo camp into the cold, windy forest. It was getting darker every minute and the rainbirds called hysterically. The general led the men quickly through the familiar routes, none of them a game trail or a path of any kind. Just bush and jungle and the paths that only existed in his and his followers' minds. He knew exactly which way to use. They were north of the Liki and Acacia lay south of Nanyuki river which in itself lay south of the Liki. To get to the ranch they had to cross the two rivers, both of which were bursting their banks with the seasonal floods. The nearest crossing-place was Kangaita bridge seven miles down Liki river. The next crossing-point on Nanyuki river was three miles due south-west from the first. After that it would be smooth sailing down to the plains.

They hugged Liki river on their trek down the mountain. All the time the furious roar of the cold dirty floodwaters was in their ears. The jungle became colder. Darkness found them about two miles from Kangaita bridge. At the same time as the darkness a light rain started falling; a cold, silent drizzle that was only felt where the foliage thinned out or they came to a clearing. Kangaita bridge was overflowing. A thick smoggy raincloud hung low, shutting out even the meagre starlight. The forest as well as the bridge was pitch dark. Water could be heard lapping on the bridge railings and thus they were sure the bridge was still intact. They had no problem finding the bridge. By linking hands with his followers, the general ventured further on to the bridge until he found the railing. The overflow on the bridge was knee-high. After finding it the general guided the next fighter to the railing and crossed. In a short time they were all across.

The rain increased to a heavy downpour. He led the fighters in the dark along the rivulet that fed the generators at the power station down river. There was no fear of losing anyone in the dark. They all knew the way. The lights from the 7th K.A.R. camp to their left showed coldly dim in the heavy rain. Past the camp they turned south by the dark, quiet P.W.D. refuse-disposal unit and across the Mawingo road on to the golf course. At the club house not three hundred yards away dogs barked dismally.

Within a few minutes they had traversed the rain- and wind-swept golf lawns and were passing near the Black Watch dogs' camp, where the dogs in their kennels howled at the scent of the bush men. Nanyuki bridge was overflowing and they repeated the crossing procedure they had used at the earlier crossing.

The rain stopped falling then, but the sky was still heavily laden and the earth below very dark.

General Haraka led his men through the coffee plantation behind the Silver Beck Hotel and west along the flooded gully in Equator Valley. They crossed the great north road and the railway lines leading to Nanyuki railway station. They went past the abattoir and into Acacia Ranch. The thorn-trees were everywhere. The rest was grass, tall wet grass that came up waist high. The cold wind that now sprang up from the north was stinging and the thorn-trees whistled with it. The silent procession headed across the cold plains to the dairy house, a mile west in the grassland.

Wambugu the dairy watchman rounded up his dogs and locked them in the kennels. He greeted the general with the usual talk of brothers and smiled a great deal. Deep within himself he was mortally afraid of the terrorists. He was afraid of what they could do to him if he failed to cooperate. Each time they came, he rounded up a few cows and milked them to feed the thirsty army. Then he handed them some of Mr Anderson's cream and anything else they wished to have, that was obtainable. He and the foreman, Karuri Thuku, a former fellow-villager and schoolmate at Pinewood, were the bread-finders in Acacia for the forest fighters. The Dairy was way out in the plains, two miles from the main village and one and a half miles from the airfield where the Kenya Regiment was stationed. Nobody lived there but Wambugu the watchman and his dogs. Nobody went there at night. When the foreman knew Haraka was coming he brought down two sheep or a calf and left them in the dairy for the visitors. He also brought down other supplies from the town and left them in the watchman's house. Then at night he would slip out of the guarded village and travel to the dairy to meet his old friends. There would be feasting and a happy reunion for the general and his old classmate. Meanwhile the watchman sat back, too terrified to say a thing. On the morning after the party the watchman, having spent a tiresome, sleepless night, would

have to bury the leftovers in the dung of the pens and erase all traces of the ceremonies before the milkmen arrived.

Once or twice the watchman thought he was fed up and wanted to report the incidents to the police or Mr Anderson, the farm owner. But the stories of Haraka murders were too grim to be taken lightly. He had no wish at all to lose his head. He could report all right and have the foreman arrested and maybe Haraka killed as well, but where would he be when all this was happening? And supposing, just supposing, Haraka got away from the soldiers? Supposing he did survive? Wambugu came to the conclusion that the risk was not worth it.

When Haraka arrived with his forces, wet, cold and hungry, there was neither sheep nor maize flour from the village. Wambugu had to deal with the emergency single-handed. He made a bonfire in his spacious house and gave them milk. They had their deer meat to cook and that saved the watchman. While some stood sentry the others fed and warmed themselves by the fire. The men went to sleep and Haraka sat by the fire, all alone but for the old watchman who had insomnia brought on by their presence. The dogs whimpered restlessly in their kennels. Later in the night a light rain started falling again. Sentries were changed and Wambugu threw more logs on the fire.

As the dawn light sneaked into the plains, the forest fighters were roused and the sentries recalled. The gang packed, erased all traces and waited. A light drizzle was falling as the formidable General Haraka led his forces into the misty acacia-covered plains. Wambugu the watchman watched them go. Then he looked round the rainy compound. Everything was in order. He walked round to the back of his shack and released his mongrels. They came whimpering to the front of the house, went inside and sat by the fire licking the firestones. The watchman heard the Land-Rover labouring in the muddy track coming from the village to bring the milkmen. Its motor whined and died and restarted again. Soon the dairy would be full of bustling and the clicking of buckets and cans. He looked round the compound once more. The dawn light was increasing and all was well. He shut his eyes tight and a thankful sigh escaped his heart. He had lived another day. He had survived another ordeal.

3

Captain Kingsley drove slowly, thoughtfully, through the town of Nanyuki, east towards Mount Kenya. Pinewood Forest Station lay nine miles up the road. A quarter of a mile from the town he turned off from the tarmac road into the dirt road that traversed the thick forest. On the right among the tall blue gums that heaven knew who had planted there and when, the Royal Bedfordshire Regiment was encamped. Their green tents stretched widely over the camping grounds with telephone and radio wires dangling over the camp into the tents. Their vehicles, a multitude of green three-tonners and a few Land-Rovers, were parked a little way to the left of the camp. On the left of the road over a grassy and bushy valley was the immense garrison of the 7th King's African Rifles, the Royal Signals and the Animal Transport Division.

The road became rougher after Blue Gum Farm. He crossed Nanyuki river for the second time and ploughed deeper into the jungle. High up on the mountain rain was falling and a dark, thick cloud blanketed the snowy peaks. Soon, the captain realised, the rain would spread down the mountain and into Nanyuki. That would take about two hours and by then he hoped he would have made it up to the village and back. If the rains caught him on the rutty forest road right in the midst of Mau Mau territory there would be hell to pay. His foot instinctively pressed down hard on the accelerator and the green Land-Rover sped along the corrugated road, raising a cloud of dust and rattling so that the driver thought it might have been heard all over the district.

At half-past three the Land-Rover skidded to a halt in front of the village gate. On the right-hand side of the gate was the forester's house. The homestead was so thickly fenced in that

only the smoke rising from the chimney was visible from the road. A small white board by the closed gate read: E. R. Jackson. All along the fence morning glory hung in violet clusters, climbing, entwining and making the fence practically impenetrable. At the sound of the Land-Rover four brutish Alsation hounds shot to the gate of the forester's compound, yelping and barking and trying desperately to climb over the sturdy gate and get at it. The captain watched the powerful, snarling, savage dogs and shook his head in thought. One of these days those beasts might just break through the gate. Then Mr E. R. Jackson would have a pack of man-eaters to round up.

The village gate was thrown open and the Land-Rover moved forward. The home-guards saluted, rather shabbily, the captain thought. A hundred yards into the village the Land-Rover stopped in the drive of the chief's post. For a moment the captain sat in the vehicle and watched disgustedly as the camp life dragged itself along. A sleepy guard stood outside the chief's office, while the rest of the band glided round the place like ghosts, their rifles held clumsily across their shoulders like walking sticks. Chickens, children and mongrels lay everywhere. A few mothers ran out to take their children back into the huts at the sound of the Land-Rover. Those were the captain's orders. He did not want to have to walk on babies while on inspection duties. And from the look of it, the orders were being virtually neglected. Maybe he had stayed away too long.

And where now was the goddamn chief? He never should have promoted the clown. But then he never had much choice when the former chief deserted into the jungle. And as long as the job did not get too exacting mentally, the present chief would do.

He reached into his pocket for a packet of cigarettes and, finding none, took one from the dashboard. He opened the pack slowly and thoughtfully. The chief should have been expecting him. His Land Rover was parked under the eaves of his thatch hut, but the chief was nowhere in sight. The door of his hut was closed, as was that of the office. The captain thought the old chief was in bed with that woman of his again; he never could find the old man busy at anything else. He decided to give the chief a few more seconds to see if the two could get the child this time. Meanwhile his eyes travelled round the camp. It was nothing

much. A semicircle of mud and thatch huts of all architectural contortions and dimensions. Each hut had a granary on stilts behind it. The camp was cleanly kept at the D.C.'s orders, grass was cut short, the paths well banked and swept. The road from the gate branched, one fork leading to the drive outside the chief's office, the other dodging through a gap in the home-guards' huts to the rest of the village behind. The gate and its watchtower, manned by the drowsy home-guards, protected the village from terrorist invasion. From being a D.C. to being a captain, Kingsley had had a lot to do in the running of the forest station. It provided a central focus for anti-Haraka operations, situated as it was in the thick of the terrorist's grounds. In all his time in the area the captain visited the main village as little as possible. There was nothing much to see there. Just a lot of wretched huts and crowds of half-starved, half-naked men, women and children.

If the chief's camp was there when the captain came, then he assumed the rest of the village was still there. It was the work of the chief and his home-guards to look over the village. The D.C. of Laikipia District provided arms and pay from H.M. Treasury and there were enough home-guards for a village the size of Pinewood Station. The spiked trench round the place was not exactly a sure guard against attack; it had never been tested. No such armed invasion had taken place. And was unlikely ever to happen. Unless another terrorist general, a stranger in the area, did so. Haraka would never invade the forest station. As far as the captain could see, Haraka would pillage and burn up the whole country before he laid a finger on the village. See, the bastard too was human.

The captain's eyes swept through the camp once more. Guards! He mused. If the terrorists ever got any cleverer, which was unlikely, the chief's camp would be a sitting duck. The home-guards would be blasted to hell long before they remembered that the sticks they carried across their shoulders were guns, not walking sticks. And the chief?

He leaned on the Land-Rover's horn. The guards had disappeared from in front of the office. A little dust-storm came from across the forest down the road and through the gate to where the vehicle was parked. The door to the chief's hut flew open. 'Here we are', the ex-D.C. thought. A woman looked out

of the hut towards the Land Rover. No doubt the chief's barren wife. Quickly the head was withdrawn.

The chief emerged from the hut a few seconds later, still buttoning up his trousers round his huge belly. Then he patted his head and dashed back into the hut for the official helmet. By the time he came back, his hat on and walking stick in hand and slippers on, the captain was waiting for him, leaning on the door of the vehicle. The chief stood nervously patting his moustache. His master watched him quietly. Here was a man entrusted with the lives of a whole village, and he could take time off in the afternoon to attend to his wife. A chief, his chief. About thirty-five to forty years old, five foot five, over two hundred pounds of lard, and the epicene face of a clown. An absolute loss in an emergency. The captain shook his head. Suddenly, the chief's hand whipped up and the hat came down from his head. At last.

Captain Kingsley turned round and led the way to the office. He pushed back the door and walked in. The home-guards remained in the drive and the chief followed his master. In one corner of the office was the rarely used desk and its black telephone. The chief never wrote down anything unless he had to. The room was otherwise bare but for a large wall-map and the inevitable portrait of the Queen. He looked round the office before turning to the chief. The place used to look like an office when he was D.C. and Haraka was chief. But Haraka!

'I rang you yesterday,' he said.

'Yes, Bwana,' the chief piped.

'I asked you to write me a certain report,' the captain went on.

'Yes, Bwana D.C.,' the chief went on humbly.

'Captain,' he reminded him.

'Kapteni,' the chief blurted out.

'Did you write it?'

'Yes, Bwana Kapteni.'

'Where is it?'

The chief, too clogged up to take in a lot of information at a go, was always addressed by the captain in short, precise sentences. The ex-D.C. had tried normal conversation once, before he had sized up the man's mental capacity. The result had been a classic. In the report he could hardly tell whether terrorists had killed villagers or villagers had killed home-guards, and by the time

the captain got this straightened out, the news was second-hand. And the chief all these years past had not learned to think of him as a captain.

'This,' the chief said, handing him the report.

He could just read the writing. It was written on two foolscap sheets and he was glad there were no more. He read the first few lines:

FROM CHIEF MR KAHURU WAMAI
PINWOOD FOREST STATION,
TO BWANA D.C. KINGSLEY
NANYUKI TOWN

He stuffed it into his pocket. He had a feeling he was not going to get a lot of sense out of the report. Anyway he would read through it at leisure. He turned to the chief, who stood at attention.

'Everything is well?' he enquired.

'Yes, Bwana Kapteni.'

'No trouble from the villagers?'

'Yes, Bwana.'

'No Mau Mau in the village?'

'Yes, Bwana Kapteni' the chief said, then added quickly: 'But they kill villager, Bwana Kapteni. Today they shoot man in the forest. Shoot four time, Bwana Kapteni. He dead. Then they ...' He passed the edge of his thick hand across his neck in a cutting motion rolling his eyes grimly as in death.

Captain Kingsley took that in for a second. Most of it was clear. Now to find out whether the incident was news, history or mere fantasy, a child of Chief Kahuru's crude imagination.

'The body, where is it?' he demanded.

'He dead, Bwana Kapteni,' the chief said, almost pleased with himself. 'Come see.'

The captain followed the old chief out of the office back into the afternoon. He was led along a row of huts to the one used as a cell. The chief pushed the door open, then stood aside for the white man to lead. The body lay on its back on the dusty floor. It was of a male of a medium build. His head lay decapitated next

to the body. The corpse was in a perfectly bloody mess, a bloody nauseating mess.

‘When did this happen?’

‘In forest, Bwana Kapteni.’ He pointed vaguely. ‘How long ago?’

The chief thought.

‘Three, four hours ago, Bwana Kapteni.’

The captain quickly walked out of the room. The chief followed and closed the door.

‘Do you know the dead man?’ ‘Yes, Bwana Kapteni.’ ‘What is his name?’

‘Weru, son of Gutu. He cook Bwana Jackson.’

‘Does Bwana Jackson know about this?’ the captain pressed on.

‘No, Bwana Kapteni.’

‘Where is he?’

‘Gone town.’

Captain Kingsley thought, that damned General Haraka again. And it was no use informing the forester. He might be interested to hear that his cook had been murdered by the Mau Mau, but that was all. As long as he got another cook, the captain was sure, Mr Jackson did not care who killed whom. He had his rifle and his Alsations to guard him and the villagers could rot for all he cared, as long of course as they turned up to tend his trees from five o’clock in the morning to five in the evening. For the tree man the village might as well not have existed. He cared little for its management and the people. He paid fees to get things done and done well. That was enough.

The ex-D.C. remembered the episode when he had approached the forest officer with plans for the welfare of the station. The forester listened patiently, pipe in hand, occasionally sucking at it until the other had finished talking. Then he spoke:

‘So what is your problem, young man?’ He seemed very little concerned.

‘Well,’ the D.C. answered, ‘I just wondered whether you could help in the organization of the ...’

The old man nearly hurled the pipe at him on mentioning the word ‘help’.

‘Help?’ He choked on the pipe-smoke. ‘I am a forest officer,

not a social services officer.' he raged. 'Trees are my business, and I don't bother you with their problems. Why come to me now with yours? Look, young man.' He said it almost tenderly. 'Let's do this: I'll mind my trees. And you mind your people.'

'You are making a great mistake,' Captain Kingsley had told him. 'I am not asking you for a favour, Mr Jackson. I am just doing my duty, my service. Her Majesty's service.'

He thought that service bit might impress Mr Jackson's stiff head. He was mistaken.

The old forester came back with:

'We are all on Her Majesty's service, Mr D.C. I look after her trees. You look after her Africans.'

The captain had not liked that part about his people, his Africans. His people, hell!

The forester had shoved his pipe back into his mouth and sucked angrily.

That was all the dialogue Kingsley ever got out of Mr E. R. Jackson. He never thought of ever having another confrontation with the forester. The proposed dispensary was never built. And now he was sure there was no need to bother the tree man with the news of his cook's death. The old man would find out later maybe, when supper failed to show up. A tale about a Pinus Something-or-other that had been knocked down by an elephant would have received more attention from the forester.

The most sensible thing to do under the circumstances, in fact the only thing left to do, was to treat the case as the criminal case it was and call the police. Murder and homicide were Inspector Brian Hudson's speciality.

The captain walked back to the chief's office with the chief trailing behind him. He lifted the telephone and started to dial. Then he paused, his index finger in the number nine slot. He turned to the chief.

'You called the police?'

The chief hesitated.

'No, Bwana D.C.'

'Captain.'

'Kapteni.'

'Why haven't you called the police?' The hesitation was more outstanding. 'Call later.'

'Why later?' the other wondered.

The chief was silent in thought for so long that the captain thought his brain might have ceased functioning. He cursed loudly and turned to the phone. It seemed everybody was so bloody scared of Haraka. Hell, they were blowing the bandit up too big.

He completed dialling 999. The operator's voice sprang at him almost instantly:

'Nanyuki Police Station. Your number, please.'

He did not bother to read the telephone number.

'Pinewood Forest Station,' he said crisply. 'This is Captain Kingsley, Kenya Regiment. I want to speak to Inspector Hudson.'

'Just a moment, sir,' the operator said.

The phone clicked, and the mellow voice of the inspector came on. 'Inspector Brian Hudson speaking.' 'Hello, B,' the captain said. 'It's George.' 'How are you doing, George?' the other said, out of habit. 'I am out at Pinewood,' Kingsley answered. 'There's some work for you here. Mr Jackson's cook has been murdered.' 'Murdered?' 'It appears so.' 'Haraka again?' 'You bet.' 'I'll be right over.'

The captain thought he detected that over zealotness he always complained to his friend about. Always eager to get to work. Be it arresting a criminal or protecting some farmer, the inspector was always in a hurry. Too much haste.

'By the way, B,' Captain Kingsley cautioned the other before he could hang up, 'the murdered man is already dead, see?'

'I know,' the inspector said evenly. 'You have already told me that.' He hung up.

The captain thought about the inspector. A young Englishman, no more than twenty-six. About the D.C.'s height but of slighter build. Recently from college. Oxford, of course, and recently married. A keen and likeable character. He had friends in the farms, in the forces and in the streets. While he believed, and everybody knew this, that an arrested Mau Mau was more valuable than a dead Mau Mau, it was not unusual to find him at the Silverbeck Hotel bartering ideas light-heartedly with a hard-core settler who believed that the only good African was a dead African, unless he happened to be working in his farm for next to nothing.

He was checked out of his meditations by the sound of vehicles pulling up the drive. He walked out of the office to meet the inspector. Then he stopped to watch the policemen in awe. The inspector was going too far. A Land-Rover and a lorry full of policemen stood in the drive. As soon as the truck stopped the policemen baled out and sergeant automatically started screaming orders. The men fell into parade, a silent parade. The captain expected the inspector to inspect the guard of honour. Instead he approached him looking more like a London bus conductor than a police inspector.

'I hope I made myself clear on the phone,' the captain smiled cynically. 'I thought I said murder, B, not potential murder.'

The inspector smiled back.

'You did, George,' he said.

'Then why all this ... this fanfare?' He spread his arms to indicate the assembled constables.

'Might you have forgotten, George,' Inspector Hudson said naively, 'my hobby besides collecting dead bodies includes chasing after and bringing the murderer or murderers to trial.'

'The man was killed by terrorists, by Haraka,' the other informed him. 'More than three hours ago, and by this time the murderers could be anywhere between here and Mars. That,' he put an emphasis on the "that", 'is my diagnosis.'

'Not too bad,' the inspector smiled.

'The body is in that hut.' The captain's voice was neutral.

The chief followed the two to the makeshift morgue. The chief and the captain remained at the door while the inspector went in. When a few seconds later he came out again he was wearing a nauseated expression on his generally placid face. He tried to interrogate the chief but completely failed to get his questions through to him. The captain made no attempt to help out. The process began to get tedious when they came to the more involved questions. Then the inspector hit on an idea. His sergeant might understand the chief better. Only a man of the chief's own calibre could understand him really well. Sergeant Juma was such a man. The inspector called him and explained. The interrogations continued without a hitch.

The story when it was unfolded turned out to have no complications at all. The home-guards had just heard shots from

the village. When they went out to investigate they came across the body. The murderers were gone. Simple as that. It was a straightforward Mau Mau killing. A Haraka thing.

The inspector agreed with the captain. It was too late now to start a chase after the killers. They needed help and maybe some tracker dogs. They could not get down to town and resume the chase before the rains fell, and anyway, chasing after Haraka with dogs was insanity. He could have traversed half the Mount Kenya forest by the time they got started, through the most impassable terrain.

The inspector accepted an offer to ride back to town in the captain's Land-Rover and stop at the Silverbeck for a drink before going on home. It was already five-thirty; as far as the captain was concerned they were doing overtime, and unpaid overtime. Half a mile from the forest station rain started falling. It fell hard in heavy, driving drops. A smell of dust drifted into the vehicle. The captain drove faster to try and clear the forest area before it became too wet to leave it. The other two vehicles kept up the pace. At the Nanyuki, water was already flowing in torrents over the bridge, at least six inches deep on the bridge itself. The roar of the river was deafening. The Land-Rover slowed to a stop about two yards from the water. The guard rails were intact, though the bridge was completely submerged. The bridge was tough and not easily to be washed away.

Captain Kingsley looked at the inspector, who was coolly smoking a N.A.A.F.I. Players. In second gear, the vehicle glided forward into the water. The current over the bridge was strong, and the Land Rover was tending to steer to the left along with it. The driver wrestled with the wheel and brought them safely clear of the bridge. The other two vehicles followed across. The last two miles to the tarmac road were a nightmare. In the ever-increasing dark and on the already too wet road the vehicles had a hard time struggling out of the mire. And the storm was far from spent. Nothing much was said. Only a curse here and there. The convoy roared into the tarmac road and headed towards the town. At the turn-off to the Silverbeck the captain waved the other Land-Rover down. The inspector issued instructions to his men. Then the captain drove to the hotel.

4

It was a dark night. As dark as any tropical night can get. Rain clouds hung low and dark. A cold northern wind sneaked through the plains, shaking the acacias and tall elephant grass mercilessly. The night-bird's call sounded more hushed and lamentful than that of other dark nights. It had a certain urgency to it, as though warning the sleeping world of an imminent disaster.

Suddenly a light flickered far off to the south along the Nanyuki-Meru road. The vehicle approached fast, swept by the police post and was gone. Its red rear lights disappeared behind the first bend and it was gone, north towards Isiolo. A light burned bright in the reception room at the police station across the road. The constable behind the desk dozed. And at the entrance to the station sentries walked to and fro behind the high barbed-wire gate. The two conversed in low tones in their joint endeavour to keep awake. Their rifles were carried carelessly in the crooks of their arms. The rest of the post, where off-duty policemen and their families slept, was dark and quiet. The two watchtowers too were dark and quiet, as still as two impotent little giants. Dark eyes scanned the dark night.

A light flickered on the northern watchtower. Then followed the continuous glow of a sentry's cigarette. That would serve as a marker. General Haraka thought.

A figure materialised next to him in the dark.

'All is well?' he asked.

'All is well,' Nguru whispered back.

'Good.'

The wind shook a bush violently.

'The telephone?' the general enquired.

'It is done,' the lieutenant answered. 'In two places, as you said. North and south.'

There was a pause.

The general wished Kimamo were with him. How was he faring where he was?

'The men, are they ready?'

'They are ready, General.'

'Good.'

Another pause, then:

'Remember the instructions well,' he went on. 'One division to take the northern tower. The other will take the southern one. Kill the men and burn the thing down.'

'Understood.'

'I will take one lot through the gate,' the general said. 'Burst through the gate and take the guardroom. Remember, too, after the towers kill everybody and burn the huts. Then converge on the main building. That is where the armoury is. That too is clear?'

'Yes, general.'

One of the constables at the gate sneezed. The night watchers turned to look that way across the road.

'Nothing must go wrong,' the general said. 'Nothing will go wrong.'

'When I give the signal, everybody attacks,' General Haraka said. 'Go pass the word.'

The headlights of the second vehicle in the last hour appeared in the south.

'Go,' Haraka said.

Nguru melted back into the darkness from whence he had come.

Haraka, watching the silent police post, wondered how many men there were on duty. Would his halved army manage? Kimamo and the rest of the band should have been here with him.

A rain-bird was calling, far in the grassland.

There was rustling around as his men prepared to charge the gate. The vehicle from the south came closer. He wished it would move faster past the post. It was the only thing he was waiting for before giving the signal for the attack to commence. It drew

closer, watched by many night eyes. Then it happened. Instead of the car going past the police post, as they expected, it slowed down on the approach and turned in. Its lights played on the gate and on the sentries as the driver waited for the tall gates to be opened.

Haraka's spirit sank in disappointment and rage. His heart beat fast and his bared teeth emitted a low snarl. The vehicle would not stop him. Nothing would.

Questions were shouted by the guards. The driver hailed back. The sentries unlocked the gate and started to open it.

General Haraka got on to one knee, the Patchett at the ready.

The vehicle started forward through the gate.

He leaped forward and ran. The few men next to him came along with him. The rest, all over the bush, waited for the signal. He vaulted a shrub, landed on the gravel road and rushed the gate. Nobody saw him come. The vehicle was through the gate and the sentries were pushing back the doors. He gave the signal then, at ten yards away.

The two policemen screamed and died at their posts.

Haraka went after the car. As it pulled up twenty yards further on, he shot a burst into it, shattering the glass and killing the three men inside.

Shooting started all over.

Feet splattered on the gravel drive as the general's men dashed through the gates after him. Some headed for the dark village behind the office block. Haraka banged another magazine into the Patchett and sprang for the guardroom. He crashed into the office, knocking one side of the glass door off its hinges.

The desk clerk sat glued to his seat, the radio wireless glowing red and bleeping to one side of him. As the tall, brutish terrorist stood over him, the man got up, shaking like a leaf in the mountain storms. He staggered back when the general approached him.

'The guns?' General Haraka asked.

The constable, who now looked like throwing up, moaned. He came closer, slowly, menacingly. 'The guns, where are they?'

The policeman had his back to the wall. The general jabbed him with the Patchett. He pointed into an inner office, too scared to speak. Haraka pushed the man into the office. A door on the further wall was locked tight. Through the glass panelling he saw

the steel doors of the armoury on the opposite wall. He turned to the frightened policeman.

'The keys,' he demanded, waving the gun.

The man shook his head and loudly wet his pants.

He believed him. The fighting was dying down outside. As yet none of his men had followed him. They were waiting for the signal. He turned his attention to the glass door, transferred the Patchett to his left shoulder and charged. Like a frenzied rhino he tore through the glass and wood. He stumbled on the splinters, staggered and got back on his feet next to the steel cage of the armoury. A dim light within lit up dark steel cases of ammunition and rows of guns, including a group of brand new 303s.

He took the grenade from his pocket, wedged it against the heavy lock and pulled the pin. He bolted back out of the office, through to the outer office. As he came out into the cold air he heard somebody run over the gravel. The desk clerk was scrambling towards the gate. The gate light was still on and he was clearly visible. Haraka let him have it. He fairly flew into the air, then crash-landed in a mess of flesh and bones.

Then came the booming explosion, muffled in the bowels of the offices. Debris was spread far, through to the outer office. Before the smoke had cleared, Haraka stormed into the armoury and looked round. Most of the arms were in order. No secondary explosion had occurred. He went for his men.

Round the back a few huts were on fire. Men, women and children screamed incessantly. As he watched, the southern watchtower exploded into flames, its grass thatch burning like matchsticks. Instantly all the shooting died out. Men came running to the general. He led them inside the office. In the armoury they forced ammo-cases open and transferred the deadly cargo into bags for easier transportation. There was a lot of ammunition, including some hand-grenades. Nguru organized the transportation. Every fighter was to take two new rifles besides a share of everything else. In less than half an hour after the commencement of the attack they were ready to leave. Back to the safety of the bamboo.

'Ready?' Haraka asked Nguru.

The lieutenant looked round at the waiting fighters. About forty of them, ragged, haggard-looking, weary but showing that

hypnotized fierceness they always took on in action.

‘Careful with those,’ Nguru said to one man handling hand-grenades.

Then he turned to the general.

‘Ready.’

‘We shall take the most direct route,’ General Haraka told his men. ‘Carefully, light-footed. You have done a good job. If we beat the rain all will be well. If the rain beats us, a trail will be left.’

He looked round commandingly.

‘Now, move.’

The men took off on sure feet, heading fast for the main gate. They passed by the three bodies of the gate-keepers and the radio operator and went east towards Mount Kenya jungle. They left behind a ravaged police post and a lot of dead policemen, some still in their burning huts.

The cold rain-wind sang in their ears. The storm above waited as though for orders to strike the ground below. Half-way across the plains the first heavy drops fell.

‘Nguru,’ Haraka spoke suddenly.

‘Yes, general,’ the other answered in the dark.

‘Was it bad?’

‘No, general.’

The rain pelted down.

‘How many did we lose?’

‘Not many. I don’t really know, though.’

Another pause, The northern wind now raged full blast, driving the rain faster, harder.

‘Three went down at the southern tower,’ Nguru said.

General Haraka for the hundredth time wished Kimamo were with him.

Then the storm proper fell. The water came down in one continuous downpour that drenched everything and everybody in a moment. The wind whipped the deluge round them and into them, lashing the loose ends of tattered clothing to their bodies. Their feet slosh-sloshed in instant puddles. And with their bags getting soggy and heavier on their backs it felt like walking upriver in midstream Liki during floods.

As the fighters hurried their laden feet to the safety of the

bamboo hideout they were grateful to the rain and the rain-making gods. By the time the storm subsided there would be no trail left by the retreat. Not a trace.

The phone rang suddenly, abruptly as the angry rattle of an S.L.R. in the dark of thick sleep. Accustomed to the urgent death-roll of machine-guns, he surfaced slowly and groped for the thing. He brought it to his ear.

'Captain Kingsley,' he mumbled sleepily.

'Ol Pejeta Police Post is under attack, sir,' the voice on the phone said. 'They just came through. It's urgent. Terrorists.'

The captain became wide awake.

'Is it bad?'

'They say it is. A full-scale raid. They are surrounded.' He sat up.

'Have the Emergency Unit ready,' he said. 'Second and Third Divisions are set. The rest ...' Captain Kingsley hung up.

He found the switch and the light flicked on. He hurried into bush uniform and jungle-boots and ran out of the room. He took the stairs two at a time. He was in the thick of the pouring rain before he realised it was raining.

'Damn.' He raced back up to his room for the raincoat.

The unit was waiting at the armoury. He collected his rifle and they jumped into the waiting vehicles. Four trucks pulled out of camp and headed west on the Nanyuki-Thompson Falls road. Rain came in torrents. Hailstones crashed on the windscreen and played a depressing tattoo on the tarpaulins covering the lorries. Visibility was very poor. In the glaring headlights, large brown splashes of mud and water danced on the dirt road surface. Skidding on the misty road was dangerous; they drove at a crawling pace.

Sitting in the cab of the leading truck, Captain Kingsley thought he heard his soldiers curse the rain. He cursed it too. He lit the driver a cigarette and one for himself. He might as well relax, he thought. At the speed they were doing, it would take a little over eternity to cover the fourteen soggy miles to Ol Pejeta and the besieged police post. And by that time a lot of nasty things could have happened. Curse the bloody rain. Why did it have to pick such a night, of all the nights in a lifetime? Or else, why did the terrorists have to? The whole crazy attack smelt of

Haraka. Haraka? In the rain, across the plains, all the way from his Mount Kenya sanctuary? Damned insanity!

He tossed out a half-smoked Rex and lit another. The convoy crept on. The dark tempest raged through the acacia plains, driven by the infinitely energetic northern gales. Seemingly many hours later the lights at the police station sprang out of the darkness. The three-tonners accelerated and skidded madly. They drew up at the gates of the police post. Troops jumped out, hit the road and scrambled for cover. The captain hugged his rifle and waited in the cab. No shooting, no one in sight. He eased the door open and slowly, patiently, climbed out. No unusual sound. He cocked his head and stepped round the truck to the front. A light burned in the main office block. Nothing moved.

'What the devil is this?' Lieutenant Peters whispered behind him.

'Let me know when you find out,' he murmured back.

Rain came down all over the place.

A man appeared in the office beyond the fence. He paused uncertainly at the door, then ducked his head and ran. The two were waiting for him at the gates, their heads buried in the tall collars of the greatcoats. Panting, he fumbled for the lock and opened the gate.

The two strode to him.

'Mau Mau,' he called them, then ran back to the guardroom.

'Bartholomew's balls,' cursed Lieutenant Peters. 'What's this?'

'I'm not quite sure he knows who he is talking to.'

Pulling his bush hat low to protect his eyes from the rain, he led the way across the flooded gravel drive to the office. The door was ajar. They walked into the outer office. It was empty. At one end there was a little pool of blood. They stopped to watch.

'Bartholomew's bat ...'

'Follow me.'

He led the way to the back room. There they found them. A crowd of demoralized, routed constables huddled together in the inner office together with the wounded and the dead. When the soldiers came in, those who could got up and tried to explain. But all most of them could say was:

'Mau Mau, they came.'

Among the few dead was their English police inspector. The wounded were put on a truck which laboured back through the rain and mud to Nanyuki hospital.

The story of the incident was as mixed up as the narrators. Everything had been quiet up to midnight. Then there was shooting and terrorists all round the post. Nobody knew how many, and they did not try to break through the fence. They just shot at anything that moved. The inspector was the first to go, as he stood in front of the office. The exchange of fire lasted for nearly half an hour. Then the invaders were gone.

'Which way?' The captain felt silly having to ask this.

'The last gunshot came from the south,' a sergeant informed him. Captain Kingsley thought. Nothing made much sense.

Back into the pelting rain, they crossed the road. Using torches they searched for the trail. It was too plain to be missed. The men had evidently made no effort to conceal their retreat. Yards wide, in the bush, broken branches and beaten grass indicated a massive movement south. The chase was hastily organized. The gang was roughly an hour ahead and with luck the pursuers would catch up around dawn. Trail persisting, of course.

Rain swirled round them. The torchlight appeared dim and wan. Wet grass came up waist high. The Emergency Unit of the Kenya Regiment struck south after the killers.

It was hard going all the way. They had to stop many times to regroup and change positions. An attempt to get into touch with the main camp by radio failed hopelessly.

By dawn they had torn their way through six miles of wet acacia, tall elephant grass and rain. The trail still led south, towards the Aberdares. They came to the flooded-over Equator Valley with its seasonal river. The muddy-brown water was as cold as the waters of the Liki. And here, at the banks of the raging fury, the trail terminated. They searched up and down on their side of the stream. Nothing turned up. They found a less torrential spot and crossed. They searched hopelessly for miles around.

The rain died down gradually. At nine o'clock the sky cleared, and a warm tropical sun smiled down on the empty Laikipia Plains. At ten o'clock they found the first sign of life: a battered,

dirty old hat with the green, red and white band of the Man Mau sewn on it. But there was absolutely no way to tell which way the owner had fled.

A radio call went through to base. The captain requested for spotters to search the open land to the south. Supplies were also demanded. In less than half an hour food was air-dropped. Four police spotters circled for miles around, searching. Meanwhile the trackers fed and rested, waiting for directions from the skies. The men were exhausted and in very low spirits.

Captain Kingsley was in an even lower state. He did not know exactly what to think. Laikipia plains were nothing like huge enough to hide a gang that could demolish a police post. Still, after one hour of listening to the whine and drone of diving, searching planes, nothing had turned up. He was getting sick with apprehension.

When the sun became too hot to bear the men crept under low acacia bushes and hid there, telling half-hearted jokes.

The first message from the spotters came in at half-past noon: 'Hawk Two calling Springbok, Hawk Two to Springbok, do you read, over.'

The Operator jumped at the set. Everybody sat up suddenly. 'This is Springbok, Hawk Two, reading you loud and clear,' the operator answered.

Captain Kingsley sidled over as coolly as he could. For a moment nothing came in, probably as the aeroplane altered course. Then:

'... come in Springbok, this is Hawk Two,' the voice burst out, strong and clear.

'This is Springbok, Hawk Two, proceed,' the operator directed.

'A gang of men sighted at twenty degrees thirty minutes, direction east, repeat, at twenty degrees thirty minutes, heading east. Just entering the forest at twenty degrees thirty minutes, do you read, over.'

'Loud and clear, Hawk Two,' the operator said. 'How many?' Captain Kingsley asked. 'Springbok to Hawk Two, how many sighted, over.' 'Hawk Two to Springbok, about thirty, forty, not very sure, repeat, forty, thirty at twenty degrees thirty minutes, over.' Captain Kingsley snatched the microphone.

'Springbok to Hawk Two, good work, thank you,' he said rapidly. 'Request keep gang in sight and report further progress, repeat, request progress report, over.'

'Springbok, I can't, repeat impossible, gang already in jungle, repeat impossible, over.'

The captain let the microphone dangle in his hand, feeling beaten. He should have given up the chase earlier last night and gone back to bed. If this were Haraka!... But Haraka? So far out in the plains? Not like him. Not like him at all.

The last radio message from Hawk Two came out strong and stinging for everyone to hear.

'Sorry, Springbok.'

Captain Kingsley reached for the map. Already he had a feeling where location twenty-three would be. The map confirmed it. Twenty miles east into the blasted Mount Kenya jungle. From the reference the terrorists had never crossed Equator Valley. Unless of course they had recrossed it to be at the pinpointed spot. He deflated, slowly, painfully.

'Call for Ladybird,' he ordered the radio man. He turned to Lieutenant Peters.

'You take the men back to the trucks,' he said. 'I have work to do in the operations room.'

'Right, sir,' the lieutenant said, then turned to the spread map. 'Bartholomew's balls! Ten miles from the police post, and the buggers are thirty miles away. Phew. All the way there.'

Captain Kingsley got up and took a walk into the bush to let off steam. While waiting for the craft he did not want to think about Haraka.

Ladybird One, the only helicopter in operation, came in soon after, flying low over thorn-trees, hovering and searching. Then it found them and alighted. Captain Kingsley said a tired farewell to his men, collected his gun and greatcoat and they were off. From the air the ground appeared bare and thinly vegetated. Not like anything that could hide a gang of thirty strong for twenty miles and be a discouraging menace to his men. Equator Valley's seasonal river, seen from the air, was just a winding red-brown path, calm and silent.

He got to base worn out and a little downhearted. The airfield was flooded with traffic when Ladybird touched down. He sat in

the helicopter for a while, watching troops disembark from large R.A.F. Beverleys. Already tents were mushrooming in the open space behind the hangars.

'Here we are, sir,' the pilot repeated, watching him curiously.

He glanced at the man, then pushed the small door open and squeezed out. His bulky greatcoat hanging in the crook of his arm, the plastic poncho smelling strongly of hot rubber on his shoulder and the heavy rifle in hand, he slowly dragged his weary body across the runway. He stopped again to watch the arriving troops. They were everywhere around the offloading zone. A blend of troopers was there, the Royal Bedfordshire, the Lancashire Fusiliers and the Devonshire Regiment, all clean shaved, smiling and laughing.

The captain looked at his own muddy, dishevelled attire and shook his head. And what stung most was the realisation that he was being sent reinforcements for something his own regiment could have managed single-handed. Time was all he needed. He had the men, he had the ability. But time, time, time!

'Pretty-looking lot, isn't it?'

He jumped.

Lieutenant Harris stood beside him, looking as clean and organized as all base soldiers did. This irritated the tired captain. 'Been in action again, sir?' He nodded distantly. 'Yeah.'

'So soon?' The lieutenant sounded surprised. 'It will never be too soon to kill Haraka.' 'Was it bad?'

'Very bad.' Captain Kingsley said. 'Not a sign of him anywhere.' Then after a pause: 'And the bloody rain.' 'Yeah, the goddam rain.'

He stared at the new arrivals, his long, tufted brows twisted, and he saw them not clean at the airfield but in the steamy jungle, their faces no longer smiling confidently but very pale, tired and sweating, full of doubt.

The aircraft engineer watched the solid features.

'By gum, you look beat,' he said.

'After last night, Harry, one cannot look anything but beat. Uh, cigarette?'

They lit up. Another mother Beverley came bumping down the runway and taxied to the loading zone. Trucks and supplies rolled out.

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'While you were out chasing after God-knows-who, Haraka was twenty miles away at Timau Police Post. The place is in a shambles, from the report I got. Killing, burning and looting. The telephone was cut and the radio smashed up by Patchett fire.'

'Oh, God,' the captain choked.

'A complete job, a total massacre,' the C.O. went on. 'And they fairly well cleaned up the armoury.'

'They would need a lot of time for that,' Kingsley said.

'They had the whole night. News only came in this morning. Not a trace of him after last night's storm.'

In the ensuing silence the captain heard the C.O. sigh.

'They say it's pathetic out there,' the voice resumed.

Kingsley winced.

'Now you see why Operation Haraka must go through once and for all?' Brigadier Thames asked. 'Yeah, I see.'

'I see your help is coming in force.' 'Yeah, they are.'

He shook his head violently to clear it.

'What beats me is that there really was somebody at Ol Pejeta last night.'

He remembered how easy the trail had been. Not like Haraka at all. He had tracked Haraka long enough to know that.

'Do you think that too could have been Haraka's doing?' he asked. The other said nothing.

'Fifty miles is a hell of a long way to send a decoy in that weather,' he observed.

'That's not important,' the C.O. commented. 'What matters is that the killers are safely back in the forest. And with a pile of arms into the bargain. Automatic rifles, hand grenades, the lot.'

A lame pause.

'You realise you need those new soldiers more so now than ever before, captain?'

The captain nodded lamely.

'And remember those sneaky Aberdare bandits might just have slipped through to him after all,' the other went on. 'A bigger army and better arms, and that makes for a sticky operation.'

'I left an easy desk job to round up Haraka,' the captain said.

'I know,' the C.O. agreed, disturbed.

'I will get the devil if it's the last job I ever pull,' Captain Kingsley said.

'Good luck.' The C.O. hung up.

Kingsley replaced the receiver. Then he got up and walked to the window, rubbing his half-shaved chin. He tried to keep Haraka out of his mind. The face of the ex-chief, the man who just could not or would not see things his way. What had they disagreed about, anyway? The chin felt warm where the bastard had socked him. Just how the hell had the brute managed to land him a knockout? Soon, he felt, very soon they would settle the score for ever. If only he could arrest Haraka instead of filling him up with a lot of lead as was very likely to happen now!

The sun shone hot on the airstrip and the Laikipia plains beyond. Another huge Beverley was circling low over the thorn-trees, losing altitude steadily as it came in to land. He watched it touch down and shook his head. Then he shrugged. Maybe he did need all those troops after all. But being shipped all that jazz to hunt down one man! One bastard of a killer and his cut-throats!

He dropped the shaver on the table and lit a Rex.

Out on the runway an Anson of K.P.R. Air Wing taxied out ready for take-off.

The pilot sat patiently and waited for orders from the control. Meanwhile he revved his engines, whistled 'Lili Marlene' and watched the big aircraft land troops from Nairobi. Another Beverley was coming in on the north-east approach. It went heavily into the smooth wide loop to the north over the blue-gums at Acacia Ranch and swept low over the thorn-trees. Then it touched down and ground to a smooth stop three-quarters of the way down the runway. It taxied to the loading zone. Members of the Lancashire Fusiliers hopped out and started unloading their equipment.

'Control to Bombaster, control to Bombaster.' The pilot of the Anson came to attention. 'You are cleared for take-off.' Then in a low tone, off record, 'Happy hunting.'

'Roger, roger, roger,' the pilot said into the microphone.

He turned his eyes to the controls. The engines roared and the propellers turned faster. He raised his glance to the runway and taxied into it. He steered left and gathered speed to the north end of the airstrip. Then he turned the plane round and came shooting down the airstrip. It bumped twice and took to the air over the thorn-trees. Over the tall blue-gums of the airfield he steered left

and headed east towards Mount Kenya and his operation. He liked Nanyuki airfield. A baby could land a monstrous metal bird on that bit of grass.

It was a beautiful morning for flying, warm and sunny. The sky was a clear blue and the ground below a beautiful dark green. The world was full of song and life and some of this affected the pilot. He sang loudly.

Below him the town of Nanyuki fell behind. Then came the golf course and an army camp. After flying over Mawingo Hotel, he changed to another song. It was a simple operation, this. Just bomb a few square miles of jungle with leaflets. He had done this kind of thing before, and he liked it. A paper bomb was nothing like a real two hundred pounder. You did not have to hit a particular spot and destroy it the way they had done over Germany. All you had to do was fly over a certain area and let go a bundle of a few hundred leaflets. Easy, hub! Now where the dickens was this target number one? He checked with the direction-finder. He was a mile north of the dropping zone and flying in the wrong direction. He corrected the error and checked the wind. Right direction and speed. Good. Those boys in the map-room had done their homework well. Unless the weather went suddenly mad, Haraka's literature would be bang on target. On time too.

The light aircraft flew further up the dense mountain jungle, then turned south. The Pilot looked down at the thick wilderness below. He was glad he had not joined the infantry as his father had wished. The R.D.R. boys must have a sticky time finding their way about down there. A damned hard time. He turned his attention to his mission.

'Forty-five degrees, twenty-three minutes.' He fiddled with the dials on the control panel. 'Height, one thousand ... one thousand ... damn it,' he read the meter again. 'Height one thousand five hundred feet. Speed ... speed, two hundred m.p.h.'

He turned more dials. The craft came lower and reduced speed. Then it started gaining speed as the nose dropped. He watched the fast-moving dials, his index finger on the button.

'Bombs away!' he told himself, and jabbed the button.

He jerked the joystick and the plane came out of the shallow dive. Very pleased with himself, he gave the thumbs-up sign to

imaginary comrades flying in formation to his right.

'Bang on target, man,' he sang.

The bomb sped towards the treetops. Then it exploded into hundreds of white leaflets. The leaflets were whisked off by the wind and born struggling further to the north, spreading over a wide area that included Pinewood Forest Station and the bamboo forest further up the mountain.

The bomber soared, turned and went south towards Naromoru forests on Operation Bombshell phases B, C, and D. The pilot was relaxed, happily singing, 'When The Saints Go Marching In.'

5

Nguru burst into the general's hut, his rifle slung over his shoulder and a white leaflet in his hand. The general sat on one of the steel cases, his foot resting on the other. The beloved Patchett lay dismantled in his lap. He cleaned it as tenderly as ever, his eyes having that distant look; probably, Nguru thought, planning some devious manoeuvre or worrying about Kimamo. When the lieutenant came in, the general glanced up, saw who it was and turned back to cleaning the gun.

'What is it?' He did not look up. 'A letter,' the other said. 'From the government.' 'What do they want this time?' 'Surrender, that is what they want us to do.' 'So that is what the aeroplane was up to this morning,' the general drawled. 'Well, what about it? You have seen the letters before.' Nguru hesitated.

'Yes.' He swallowed. 'But they are everywhere. They must have dropped thousands of them.'

The general continued the cleaning.

'What do you expect me to do about them?' he asked without looking up.

Nguru was silent for a moment, then: 'There are too many,' he uttered.

'If the government wants to throw away paper, it's their paper.' the general told him. 'Let them.'

'There are too many,' Nguru insisted. 'Leaflets can't shoot. Let them lie.'

Nguru shifted his feet. He glanced at the bending general and beat a silent, hasty retreat.

General Haraka sighed and looked up. The bamboo fire by his side had burned low; it was almost out. He fed more faggots

into it. He pushed the jungle-boots closer to dry off last night's wet. The jungle-jacket hung on the wall near the fire. At one end of the room was the new stock of arms. A little hill of hand-grenades rose from the floor to one side. All the fruits of the raid two days back.

Now he had arms. More arms than he had hands to operate them. If only those fighters from the south, from the capital, would come now. And what was keeping Kimamo and the rest of the gang? They should have put in an appearance last night as planned. Unless unless ...

He brushed an insect from his hairy chest. He pushed the long stringy hair off his face.

He went back to cleaning the gun.

Nguru came in again, this time to bring a meal of maize and buck meat. It was placed to one side of the fire. Then there was commotion outside the hut and Kimamo walked in, wet, muddy and exhausted.

The general's heart lit up.

'Kimamo,' was all Nguru could say.

'See that the men are fed,' the general ordered.'

Nguru went to do as he was bid.

Kimamo walked over slowly, tiredly.

'You are late,' General Haraka said.

'It was a long way,' the lieutenant answered. 'The rain was bad and all the rivers and streams are flooded. It was a long journey.'

'I am glad you are back,' the general told him. 'How are the others?'

Kimamo laid his rifle by the fire and went down on his haunches. 'They are tired and hungry,' he sighed.

'How was it out there?'

'They were easy. No one was hurt.'

'That is good.'

'We lost Kimani in Gura,' Kimamo said after a pause. 'The river was very bad'.

His eyes lighted on the arms booty. He jumped up and ran over. He picked a rifle and hugged it.

'Guns, guns,' he said ecstatically. 'Good, good'.

He dropped the rifle and dug into the sack of bullets, letting them run coppery through his fingers. He hustled to the heap of

grenades. Then he stopped and stood watching them respectfully. He went down on one knee and picked one up carefully. He examined it gently, tenderly, bringing it close to his cheek, rubbing it on his cheek to feel the cold deadly power within. He replaced it, looked the heap over lovingly, then came back to the fireside reluctantly.

The general smiled a reserved smile.

'How was it?' Kimamo wanted to know.

'Not bad,' was all the general said.

'Anybody killed?'

'Three.'

Kimamo sighed tiredly. His eyes lighted on the general's food.

'Eat,' Haraka told him without looking up from cleaning the gun.

'But ...' 'Eat.'

Kimamo thankfully took the calabash of maize and meat.

'For three days we have not had a morsel,' he said, his mouth full of food. 'Nothing.'

The general nodded in thought.

'But the men were patient,' Kimamo told him.

His large teeth tore through the leg muscle of the buck.

'We found a gang on the run,' he went on after a few more mouthfuls.

The general froze in his movements.

'From the Aberdares,' Kimamo went on. 'They said it was bad up there. And ...' he hesitated. 'They would not join us. They wanted to go to Meru. It is quiet there, they said.'

His chewing movement became slower, uncertain. His eyes no longer bore the merry glitter they had had over the arms. He refused to meet the general's eyes.

'Kimamo,' Haraka called.

He looked up suddenly. Startled.

'What else did they tell you?' the general demanded.

'Well, uh, nothing much,' he floundered.

'What?'

Kimamo considered for a moment. He shrugged helplessly.

'They said,' he shook his head to clear the fog, 'they said the fight is lost in the south. General Jembe is dead. And General Karanga has surrendered to the white soldiers. It is very bad down south. And it is getting worse.'

Haraka sighed and shrugged off a cold chill that tried to creep in on him.

'The tide will turn,' he drawled.

Kimamo watched his careless gun-handling, then broke down. 'It is bad,' he choked.

Haraka squinted down the barrel of the machine-gun. 'What else did the cowards say?'

Kimamo pushed aside the half-eaten food and fumbled with his breast pocket.

'Here,' he unfolded the sheet. 'See this.' The general looked up. 'What is it?'

'A letter from the soldiers. Here, read it.'

The general's attention returned to oiling the gun.

'I have seen others before.'

'There are hundreds, thousands of these, all over,' Kimamo said. 'I tell you it is bad. They are everywhere.'

'You act like one who has never seen them before.' The general's voice was low, dangerously low.

'But, General, these ones have your name on them.'

He made no indication of having heard. He finished cleaning the gun first. If Kimamo was worried, then maybe there was something in it after all. Kimamo was not one to scare easily. He was a good lieutenant. So dependable. If only he had a hundred Kimamos. Just one hundred. He slammed back the magazine into the gun so hard the lieutenant nearly jumped. Already a battle was raging in his mind.

'Your name, General,' Kimamo went on. 'It is addressed to you.'

'So what difference does it make?' he asked. 'Just a name.'

'And your picture,' Kimamo exploded.

'Here.' Haraka stretched out one big arm. 'Let me see that.'

A dark face stared blankly back at him. He clearly remembered the picture he had had taken as a chief many years back. Clean-shaven, round-cheeked and wearing the cursed colonial crown. He had read many false amnesty letters before. He had read them too sickeningly long. The persuasive language, the governor's signature and the rest were all the same. But unlike the others this letter bore his image and was directed to him.

He handed the paper back to the bearer.

'It is not too different from the others,' he mumbled. 'Maybe' - he stopped significantly - 'Maybe they baited General Karanga with his photograph too.'

'The deadline is the 23rd,' Kimamo said.

'October 23rd is not very far off,' Haraka told him. 'But there is no hurry. They will have to come to us.'

Kimamo remained silent. Haraka looked fixedly at him.

'You know I shall not surrender, don't you?'

Kimamo nodded.

'Never!' the general affirmed.

'Maybe we ought to move out now,' the lieutenant suggested. 'Now?' Haraka queried. 'It is still too early. We cannot leave now. When the time is ripe, we shall go to another place.' 'Far,' the other said.

'Yes, further up the mountain, where it will be hard to follow. Then when they come, we shall be ready for them. Yes, we shall go deeper.'

'Further than that,' Kimamo went on.

The general looked up at him questioningly.

'How far do you suggest?' he asked.

'As far as possible,' Kimamo told him. 'To the other side of the mountain. To Meru District.'

General Haraka had thought of that and knew all the points against such a move. He needed no time to think up the disadvantages of such a great emigration. He shook his head firmly, and his voice was as hard as the barrel of his Patchett.

'No!'

The other moved.

'But we must, General, we must,' he cried. 'They are very serious this time. I can feel it. They will all come. Don't you understand what this means? Now that all the others are out of the way they will turn on us. All of them. They might drop bombs on us as they used to do. We must go far this time.'

Something moved within the general's being. His lieutenant was speaking a lot of truth. It was the most natural thing to do, run far. But the odds, the odds were too high against it.

'The government is determined to destroy us,' he said quietly. 'They do not only not want us in Laikipia. They do not want us at all. They will follow us wherever we go. We cannot escape them

completely. It is unwise to run that far for nothing. Sooner or later we shall have to stand and fight them back. I say the sooner the better. And now we have arms. Move we shall, yes, but no, we shall not go to Meru. Not that far.'

'By the time they catch up we could have doubled or trebled our numbers and strength,' Kimamo insisted.

General Haraka nodded his large head.

'We have always managed with sixty troopers,' he said. 'We have eighty now. That is enough. More than adequate.' The lieutenant was silent. He fidgeted.

'We have never been to Meru,' Haraka went on. 'We don't know the land there at all. We don't know the people and their language. They might even not want us around.'

'Of course they will,' Kimamo broke in. 'They must, for the good cause. They will understand if we explain it to them. It is for the good of everybody. They must understand and help. They will.'

The general looked up. He was smiling a hard, pained and understanding smile.

'They will, will they?' he said quietly. 'Why don't we try convincing the chief and his home-guards first? They are much nearer and understand our tongue. If our own fellow-villagers will not understand us, why should we be so sure strangers will? Why should they understand us?'

Kimamo opened his mouth, licked his lips and shut it.

'Here we have the villagers and Karuri the foreman and his men,' the general pressed home. 'That is enough.'

Kimamo looked at the sheet in his hands and thrust it at the general.

'We have until October 23rd with them,' he said finally. 'After that we are on our own.'

The general took the sheet.

'The storm will not last more than a few days,' he told his lieutenant. 'The villagers can remain faithful that long. Only while the pressure is on do we need their understanding. After that they have no choice but to help us.' He seemed to think for a moment and then, 'Have you forgotten what the little general said? We are not alone. Maybe the others will come to our assistance.'

The lieutenant remained silent. He was beaten, as usual.

'The people of Pinewood and Acacia will be sworn to allegiance before the 23rd,' the general went on. 'The oath will have to be strong to keep them loyal throughout our absence. Then we will retreat higher up the mountain to let the heat cool off. If the soldiers feel like coming after us, why, let them. The old ones used to say that the pursuer and the pursued both get equally tired. There is much wisdom in that.'

The lieutenant thought. The general was right. After all, he had got them out of many a tight spot without having to go all the way to Mem. As always, he would manage. Between Pinewood Forest Station and Acacia Ranch, they would survive. They had done so before.

Haraka pondered over the imminent storm and felt uneasy and unsettled within. He was sure they were fighting for the right cause. Out at the village he would make them understand. He would tell them about the soil, the land and the jungles the way the little general used to do. He would talk about the spilt blood and the white man's selfishness and oppression. All the things the little leader had spoken about, including freedom. The freedom of the black man in his country. Where had the little general learned all that? From the others he said were in the south, in the capital? Or had he read it in books in an intermediate school? And did the others in the capital know about the fighting and the bombs? Did they? And about the soldiers and the leaflets, did they know about those too?

He looked down at the amnesty paper in his hand. He read it over again. What a bargain!

'I have seen a lot of bargains made,' he said quietly. 'This white governor drives a hard bargain – our freedom for his leniency and prison. That is a cruel bargain. The devil's bargain.'

Thoughtfully he held the leaflet to the flickering, dying flame. The flames grew longer, stronger as they fed on his image, lapping it with fiery tongues and turning it to black, impotent ash.

The night was dark and cold. The leaves and the bush were wet with dew. All round them the night life went on as though the intruders did not exist. Night-birds called, hyrax screamed and crickets clicked just as they had done the night before, and the night before that, and just as they would do the following night

and for ever after. The stars in the clear sky twinkled as they had done throughout the ages, with the same timing and show of colours. And the night was a night just like any other night.

Haraka led his men silently and light-footed to the village ditch and stopped, listening. Pinewood Forest Station was deep in sleep. Nothing moved in the village across the ditch. The home-guards had retired to their huts after the early hours of curfew. The village was peacefully asleep. Kimamo made his way noiselessly among the ranks to the general. He stood by the general, watchful.

‘The bridge,’ Haraka commanded in a whisper.

Kimamo vanished back into the dark undergrowth as silently as he had come.

General Haraka brought his Patchett to the ready and slipped off the safety-catch.

Kimamo came back with Lieutenant Nguru, carrying the makeshift bamboo bridge. They laid it across the trench and stepped back, holding their rifles at the ready.

‘Test it,’ the general said in a whisper.

Lieutenant Kimamo made to cross the bridge over the dark, deep and dangerously spiked ditch. Haraka placed his hand on his shoulder and stopped him.

‘Nguru,’ he said to the other lieutenant.

Nguru hesitated. Then, when no other word came from the general, he turned round and gingerly, sullenly passed over the feeble bridge. Once on the other side he stood gun in hand, looking around.

‘Down, you fool,’ the general nearly shouted at him.

Nguru went down flat on the wet grass.

General Haraka was satisfied. The bridge was tough and there were no home-guards around.

‘The others,’ he said to Kimamo.

Kimamo gave a low signal. The fighters emerged from the bush one by one, their guns ready.

‘The huts over to the left and right,’ Kimamo told them as they filed by. ‘Remember, safety-catches off once across. Over to the left and right. Hurry up, back there.’

The fighters peacefully went by and ran over to their cover areas, where they lay still, their eyes watchful. The right and left

fronts were covered. The whole front could be well covered from the bridge.

When the general was satisfied that enough fighters had crossed the ditch he nudged Kimamo with the snout of the Patchett. Kimamo catfooted to the village and dropped down by Nguru. After a whispered conversation, they split, each joining a batch of troops to one side. Then the rest of the gang paraded by the general.

'Right in front,' he told them quietly. 'Careful with that bridge. No hurry, careful now. Right in front.'

The general crossed just before the last two fighters. At his instructions they pulled the bridge to the village side of the ditch and stayed lying by it, guarding it. Not that it was very likely, but if someone or something just slipped the bridge into the ditch and warned the guards ...

One of the huts nearest to the village belonged to old Mwaniki, a long-time supporter of the Mau Mau and the only collaborator who had escaped Chief Kahuru's collaborator sweep. Not that the chief did not know about his activities. He did. But the chief's wife, Muthoni, was Mwaniki's youngest daughter, and the dowry was not half paid. Old Mwaniki had let Kahuru take the girl when he was nothing but a home-guard and did not have a chicken with which he could pay the dowry. And when Kahuru became chief, the great chief, the almighty Simba, he paid for the dowry with protection. That was enough for the old man, for what was more important than life itself? To live and see things come and go, just to be there and witness the changes that could overtake generations overnight. Protection was more than enough for the old man.

Mwaniki's hut opened to Kimamo's knocking code. The door was pulled back noiselessly. The general and his lieutenant walked into the dark hut, and the old man shut and locked the door again. Then he silently went round them to the fireplace and uncovered the glowing stumps of wood, removing the ash that covered them. He added twigs and blew at it until it flickered to life. He added bigger logs and sat back, still on his knees at the fire-side. A shrivelled old man with sunken, hawk-like eyes. He regarded the night visitors quietly in the dim light. He looked a little uneasy.

'It is the son of Nyaga,' General Haraka told him.

The old man smiled an old, retiring smile.

'You are welcome to Mwaniki's hut,' he mumbled, working his toothless mouth slowly. Then, after a moment of silence, 'What do you want, son of my age-mate? I don't have a morsel in this hut.' Thoughtfully, 'I wish I had known you were coming. I would have had some food for you from my son's hut. They are always eating.' Nodding philosophically, 'Always eating, eating.'

'It is not food we want,' the general said.

The old man turned his hawk-like eyes on the speaker.

'Not food,' he said to himself. 'You can take what you want from the house of your father, go ahead.' The old eyes swept round the room. 'But there is not much to take. Yes, go on.'

'Your people,' the general said, in the only way he knew to get along with the old man. 'The villagers. We came to doctor them. Clean them of the white man's ills. We came to initiate them.'

The old man thought over that and nodded in a tired way.

'Yes, there are a few untreated ones,' he murmured, smoothing his long, grey beard. 'Yes, there are some. That is good. I know all of them. I could tell you the few. I always knew you would ...'

'Everybody will be doctored,' the general told him.

'All the village?' the old man asked the flickering fire.

'All,' the other answered.

'But...' Mwaniki picked up a burning stump and tapped the fire-stones as he spoke. 'These ones here we have already branded. It is the calves that remain to be marked'.

'It is good for all,' the general told him. 'The tribal marks grow dimmer.'

Old Mwaniki reflected on the wisdom of the words. He nodded slowly.

'Oh, yes, they do,' he said faintly. 'They do.' 'We have no time to waste,' the general said. The old man shrugged, looking into the fire. 'Go on, my sons, go on,' he told them.

General Haraka nudged his lieutenant. Kimamo went back out to give orders.

'There is no trouble?' Haraka asked Mwaniki.

'Oh, no, no, not any.' The old man worked his mouth slowly, smoothly. 'You know you can use my hut as your father's own.'

Any time ...'

'Not that,' Haraka quietened his host. 'From the soldiers, the chief?'

'That barren son of the devil.' Mwaniki put some life into the curse. 'He can't even make my daughter pregnant. He has slept with her now for years and not even a one-legged child. He is as dry as rock.'

'Has he given you any trouble?' the other asked.

'Not since he killed the son of Gutu,' Mwaniki said. 'You knew the white man's cook?'

The general paused in his movements. So that was what had happened to Weru, the forester's cook.

'Yes,' Haraka told him. 'I heard about that.'

The old man shook his head sadly.

'From then there has not been a single soldier in the village,' he said hauntedly. 'Weru was a good man. He used to bring me food from the white man's kitchen.'

The lieutenant returned. All was well outside. The sentries were posted and the first batch of villagers was up and waiting outside the hut. Preparations started in the hut.

Mwaniki, long since a widower, lived all alone. All the withered old man's children were grown up and married. Apart from the small wooden bed, with its collection of sacks and old blankets, and a collection of old stools black with age, the hut was bare of furniture. Cracked pots, plates and gourds lay unused around the hut. Behind the door, heaped nearly to the sooty thatch, was a hill of firewood fetched for him by his grandchildren.

The general's men set about moving the old man's possessions around to make more room. Soon all was ready.

'Shall I start?' Old Mwaniki came eagerly, feebly to his creaking legs.

'No!' Haraka said quietly. 'There is no question of your loyalty. You take your stool and sit over there. You could go to bed if you like.'

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'I will watch,' the old man said, struggling with his stool.

He took his snuff-box from where it hung on a chain round his neck and sat watching, and thinking. He had watched many such ceremonies. But since his son-in-law the chief warned him against supporting Mau Mau, nothing had occurred in his hut.

Not that he was afraid of the chief; the terrorists had not come to administer their medicine. No, he was not afraid of the chief. For under the promise of protection the old man's sentiment had grown into a deep-rooted belief in liberation, a belief that not even the threat of death could weaken.

Deep down from his past, old Mwaniki was an anti-oppressionist, an anti-white and a radical revolutionary. He had lived a hard time, travelled a rough road. He and old Nyaga, Haraka's father, and old Wamai, the father of Kahuru, the chief, Simba. Had it not been for his respect for Wamai, his father, Kahuru would never have married the daughter of Mwaniki, even with a full dowry to pay. Mwaniki had seen the boy, Kahuru, grow up together with the rest, a weakling of a boy, a girl of the male sex, no good to anybody. This was no secret in the village. If anything was done wrong by the village youth, they always brought Kahuru's name forward as the scapegoat. Too stupid to argue for himself, Kahuru always ended up guilty of the crime, however silly it was. At the thought of Kahuru Wamai, now a chief, old Mwaniki spat in disgust.

Yes, they had come a long way, he, Mwaniki, old Nyaga and old Wamai and all the other old men of the village. They had come all the way from beyond the Aberdares to work for the government and Bwana Jackson. They came on the promise of farm land, money and school for their children. Tempted thus by the government, they sold their homes in the land of their fathers and came down to the promised land. Promised land! Old Mwaniki spat. One day they cleared the bush, fenced it in and planted maize, potatoes and peas. The crops thrived, and that was their promised land, for the moment. But only for the moment. The next season the white man, Bwana Jackson, brought truckloads of young trees to be planted among the maize and the potatoes in the fields. The following season, when the treelets had grown healthy and strong among the maize, the maize that was being nursed by the women as they nursed their potatoes, the farmers had to stop growing food there. The trees had to be left in peace and not be hemmed in with potatoes and peas. The trees were now capable of looking after themselves. From then on the fields were tree-land and belonged to the Ministry of Trees.

Bwana Jackson made it very clear. No one was allowed to

continue planting his maize among the trees. The maize would attract elephants and buffaloes and these could ruin his trees. If the village wanted to go on growing and eating their maize, there was more land further up the mountain and they could take as much as they wanted. A lot of free, fertile land for the hard-working villagers. Land, huh! Old Mwaniki spat at the thought of that. Always moving, moving like a lot of itchy-buttocked nomads from one thicket to the next, only pausing long enough to clear the ground and make it suitable for Bwana Jackson's accursed trees. Had it not been for the fact that people had to eat, and Mwaniki had a crowd of eating little people in his house, he would have packed up and left Bwana Jackson to clear the jungle himself. But the children, they had to eat. Eat, eat, eat, all day every day. And you could not take such a party home to your own people, where only a few years ago you had sold your land. What would they eat?

The promised school for the children, huh! He spat again. Another white lie. It came too late to admit any of his children, and even then it was no good. Besides taking hard-earned money in fees, how much good did it do the children? Only up to standard four and no further! The children could not go on to an intermediate school and learn more, and become D.C.s, clerks and tax collectors and wear khaki suits and ties. All they did was go to the village primary school and pay fees. Then they came out just as they had gone in, with nothing at all to show for their time and money. They learned nothing. Only how to read and write. And in anticipation of things to come, they were taught how to handle a pruner at school. A treepruner like their fathers used! Then they came out of school and started clearing the jungle and planting trees for Bwana Jackson for six shillings a month like their fathers. They got wives, and the wives worked hunchback in the tree-land and bore a lot of eating little children. And, like their fathers, they could not leave. The children had to eat and continue eating. Besides, where would they go? Few of them had ever ventured out of the forest station to the town of Nanyuki they heard lay to the west of the jungles. So, like their fathers, the young men became prisoners of Bwana Jackson and his trees. And – old Mwaniki shook his head dejectedly - then the

grandchildren would go to the village primary school and learn to read and write.

The oathing reached a climax. Villagers were herded in and out of the little hut quickly in an effort to beat time. General Haraka, a grim look that was almost murderous on his face, conducted the ceremonies in the flickering firelight. But for his voice and the neophytes' murmuring, the hut was shadowy and silent. Every now and then one of his men threw a fresh log on the fire. Outside the hut and under the eaves of the neighbouring huts, sentries stood guard in the cold night.

Old Mwaniki, in one of the darker corners, watched the proceedings and admired the young man who was the general. He had known him for a long time. Why, he had even been sworn to allegiance in this same hut when he was chief. That was before he went into the forest to fight for the lost land. Mwaniki remembered him even as a little boy, tall, strong, wily and very good-mannered too. Old Mwaniki himself was one of the ten-man committee that had voted the learned Maguru into the well-intentioned and now long-dead security council. Of all the fine young men that ever went to the doomed primary school, only Maguru had escaped the bewitched pruners and Bwana Jackson's trees. He was such a farseeing young man. See how he had abandoned his position as village chief to serve the hopeless, to fight for freedom! The villagers' lives depended on such young men as Haraka. That was why, in the face of all danger, any danger, old Mwaniki's support would be with the forest fighters. The fighters for freedom. They could use his hut for their oaths any time they chose. And if the chief and the soldiers came and killed him, the son of Kara, tomorrow, why, it would be for a worthwhile cause.

Mwaniki took snuff from the little container round his neck. And where would they bury him? he mused. Not among Bwana Jackson's trees. The forester would see to that. Where then? Behind the hut by the rubbish pit? He wished he had stayed back home and never come to this jungle village. But, yes, that land bait had been too good to ignore. How much good was land you could not build your own hut on? How much good was land your carcase could not find rest in after the end?

The oathing ceremony came to a stop at dawn. Outside, the

cocks were crowing. All the villagers were safely back in their huts. Only a small proportion of the village population remained unsworn in. The others had cooperated and it was highly unlikely that the chief and the government would hear of it. The remainder of the village would be dealt with later.

The general gave orders to prepare to leave. Old Mwaniki was proud of the whole operation, and the general. So calm, so admirably brave.

'All is well?' he asked.

'All is well,' the general answered without looking up. 'The others will be seen later.'

He stood next to Kimamo by the fire, deep in thought. All was well. Almost too well.

'Tomorrow?' the old man looked up.

'Not tomorrow,' Haraka told him. 'Another day. Tomorrow we go elsewhere.'

The old man sighed a mixture of relief and anxiety.

'You know you are welcome to my house, son of Nyaga,' he said to the flickering fire. 'Since they arrested your family and relatives I have always thought of you as my own son. You know that, don't you?'

General Haraka nodded. He had a lot of things to think about. There were the workers at the Mawingo Hotel to initiate. Then there was Gathiuru Forest Station, Ontulele and the farms. Acacia Ranch was to be visited too. The remaining quarter of Pinewood Forest Station had to wait. He could afford the time.

October 23rd was still some way off.

6

Captain Kingsley pulled the pyjama top across his large chest. He sipped from the glass in his hand. The large operation map was spread at his feet. And from six-foot-two up everything looked perfect. So damned perfect he was almost sure something, somewhere, was wrong. It just must be.

The large toe of the right foot pointed to a point eight miles west of Nanyuki at the place where the Nanyuki joined the Liki. 'R.D.R. One,' he said.

The toe moved up the river valleys to the village of Pinewood Forest Station.

'No hitch,' he told himself.

His hand swept wearily through the blond hair.

His wrist-watch read 2.30 am. He shook his head and took another mouthful from the glass.

'Now just this once more,' he soliloquized.

He replaced the glass next to the bottle of Scotch whisky on the table. Going down on his knees on the soft velvet carpet, he once more examined the map of Laikipia District. He studied every little river valley, every stream and game trail that was marked. With a pencil marker he reviewed the troop positions marked with large blue X's. He re-examined the broad red arrows leading out of the vicinity of Pinewood Forest Station. The arrows led slap-bang into the X's east, north, in all directions. The terrorists simply could not break out without running into his hunters. He bent and twisted the arrows in his mind, trying to use the most unreasonable escape routes. Haraka could be very unconventional, but nothing could get the bandits past his cordon. There was just no escape.

Next he reviewed the troops under his command. All the crack hunters from the crack battalions were at his disposal. And he was using them well. But maybe Lancashire F2 should have taken the most unlikely south-west trail, and let his own Lieutenant Peters comb the Buffalo Heights right and left of the Devil's Spine.

The captain shook his head, chewing thoughtfully on the pencil marker. In spite of its being the most unreasonable route, he had the Devil's Spine covered. He looked it over. A small insignificant stream trickled through the jungle, hundreds of feet below the ridge. Giant volcanic rocks, monstrous trees and loose earth rendered the area inaccessible. There was no through way along the gully either. But the Mau Mau could be most stubborn and might use the route anyhow. The Lancashires would be there waiting.

He got to his feet and pulled up the pyjama trousers. He poured himself another shot of whisky.

At his feet lay Operation Haraka complete and sealed, airtight.

He swallowed the drink in one gulp. He fought off the temptation to go back on his knees to the map. Instead he sat on the bed, feeling eager and expectant. All that remained was to move the troops to their designated starting points; then, poof, Haraka would be no more.

He lit a Rex and smoked sitting on the bed. He glanced at the watch. 3.00 am.

'Damn.' He crushed the cigarette out in an ashtray on the bedside table.

He got into bed, stretched and yawned. The tactical experts had led him over a big course. It had taken him superhuman patience to get them to agree that his operation was foolproof. And now he too saw the light. It shone brightly through the storm and lit up a peaceful Mount Kenya, a small forest village, and the cool Laikipia Plains and their green, static acacias. He was beginning to settle down on a warm green patch of grass to rest his weary bones. Then the sun became hot, and hotter, and the low whine of the wind suddenly became hushed and husky; and it was the whispering ugly voice of Brigadier Thames, saying:

'The very last chance!'

The telephone exploded into life.

He jumped from a light sleep. His heart was racing and sweat stood on his broad brow.

'Captain ... Kingsley,' he gasped.

'Emergency, sir,' the voice on the telephone said. 'Bandits have been reported, sighted in the vicinity of Acacia Ranch.'

The captain was quiet. His mind was still in the jungle with Operation Haraka. All else was secondary.

'Well,' he stumbled. 'Where did you say that was?'

'Acacia Ranch, sir.'

'Acacia is a big place,' impatiently.

'At the dairy, one mile up the road.'

The captain thought.

'Confirmed?'

'Not yet, sir.'

'Well, what are you waiting for? Send someone up there to find out. And ... wait, is it raining?' 'Raining, sir?' 'Yes, rain.'

'No, sir. Why?'

'Send me the confirmed report.' 'Right away, sir.'

The captain hung up. He was not going to be dragged out of bed on a rainy night to chase after shadows. Not tonight. Not this week. Never again. He settled down on the warm soft bed and closed his eyes. Just what was the notorious Haraka doing at this moment? What was he doing with his last days in the jungle, in Laikipia District, his last days on earth? He jumped out of bed and went back to the map. He knelt there, reading it, looking out for slips. He stared at the contours and the ...

The phone roared one angry second. He reached for it.

'Confirmed?'

'Confirmed, sir.'

He hung up. What was he supposed to do? He dressed and went out. Thank God for one thing, it was not raining. The cold night wind hit him a stinging blow. He pulled his jacket over his chest and hurried to the guardroom.

'Well?' His voice was unnecessarily gruff as he addressed the sergeant on duty.

'Emergency Unit is ready, sir.'

'What is this all about?'

'A call came from the police,' the sergeant explained. 'They

were informed by Mr Anderson that his home-guards had reported terrorist activity at his dairies.'

'Well?'

'I was up there,' the sergeant paused. 'They had just left. In a hurry. They can't be very far.'

The captain sighed. Another goddam chase.

The experienced old soldier handed him his rifle.

'Here we go again,' he said in resignation.

Two truckloads of armed troops left camp and sped to the dairy. At least it was not raining, Captain Kingsley tried to comfort himself. Fire glowed low in the dairy house. There was smell of roast meat everywhere. In the watchman's hut there was a calabash of raw meat, another of roast meat and one full of blood next to them. In a dark corner there were two gourds of milk. The whole place showed signs of a big feast, and a hasty retreat. The watchman and his gun were missing. His dogs whimpered in their kennels behind the house.

The captain ordered a search to be made for the watchman's body. It was nowhere to be found. They could not follow the trail far in the grassland. A few hundred yards into the plains the trail vanished. He was at a loss.

'The dogs, sir,' the resourceful sergeant reminded him.

'That's right.' He woke up. 'Those beasts will do the trick.'

He called for the truck driver.

'The rest of you stay here,' he told the sergeant.

The truck raced back to camp. He placed a call to the military combat-dogs section of the Black Watch. He had to speak to a sleepy lieutenant who needed too much explanation before he would let the dogs go. When he hung up, the captain sighed. Lieutenant! Hell, most N.C.O.s were brighter than a lot of the two-pip bastards in camp. He remembered Brigadier Thames. Another bastard. Whatever reason had made the 8th Army see him as fit for brigadier?

The truck raced back up the road. It stopped at the turn-off to the dairy and they waited.

The captain looked at the luminous hands of his watch. 5.30 am. Out to the east the dawn was approaching. The mountain was silhouetted against a reddening, clear sky. The town of Nanyuki seemed distant, cold and peaceful. A cold wind came across the

plains from the north. Another goddamn day of playing hide-and-seek with the goddamn terrorists was approaching.

He lit himself a cigarette. The driver sat back quietly, yawning now and then and rubbing his hands to keep them warm. Three miles towards the town the headlights of a vehicle flickered on the usually deserted road. At this hour of the night it could only mean one thing. The tracking hounds were on the way. The captain watched quietly as the light came nearer. Then the vehicle turned off into the airfield road.

'That's it,' the captain said, then tossed his cigarette carelessly out of the window on to the road.

The driver started the engine and kept it running. The other vehicle came nearer. The captain jumped down from the truck and flagged the other truck down. From the back of the three-tonner he heard dogs whimpering. Their keepers murmured consolation.

'Follow me,' he said to the driver and jumped back into his own truck.

The two trucks roared hoarsely and drove down to the dairy. The captain consulted the officer in charge of the hounds. The officer was no more understanding than he had sounded on the phone. He insisted on having the facts of the situation before his precious dogs were off-loaded. Damnation! Another two-pip bastard.

'They were here,' Captain Kingsley told him in explanation. 'They went this way.'

'How long ago, sir?' the lieutenant asked.

'About an hour ago,' the captain told him. 'And unless you hurry with those dogs we will never catch up.'

'How many were there?' the lieutenant went on.

The captain was impatient, furious.

'If I had been here to count them they would never have left alive,' he said. 'Now jump to it, lieutenant.'

That might do, he thought. Cut them down to size. Works every time. Throw the difference at them and they fall back into place instantly.

The lieutenant gave the orders and the hounds were off-loaded. There were six of them, three South African Doberman pinschers and three German Alsations. Each of the trackers had

an armed handler. Dawn was breaking and there was more light. The captain led the dog party to the point where they had lost the trail. His troops stood back to let the handlers pass. Some of the hounds that were especially trained to track down Mau Mau were already yelping, sniffing at the ground. They strained on the leads and the handlers leaned back restraining them, waiting for orders. When the captain nodded, the lieutenant gave the order and the party leapt forward. As they proceeded on the trail the scent became stronger and the hounds more excited. They barked and bayed as they dragged their handlers into the ever-lightening plains. The dogs raced along and the troopers panted close behind, trying hard to keep up with the trained handlers. At first the trail led due east across the plains, then it turned left and headed north towards Nanyuki river. Naturally, the captain thought. A quarter of a mile further on the trail split. Two of the Alsations turned west while the other four headed north. The party paused. 'A mistake?' the captain asked.

'My trackers are rarely wrong,' the lieutenant told him, with a stinging emphasis on the 'my'. 'There must have been a split in the gang.'

'The scent is quite strong,' one of the handlers called back. 'Which one shall we follow, sir?' the lieutenant asked. The captain thought fast. 'Both,' he said.

The lieutenant looked round at the fifty-man patrol. It was obvious that he did not approve of the decision. Fifty divided by two came to twenty-five. Twenty-five men was not the ideal number to go chasing terrorists at dawn. Not while his dogs were tracking the bandits.

'We shall get reinforcements,' the captain told him. 'But we must keep up the chase.'

While a driver ran back to collect more troops with one truck the search party split into two. One of them, twenty-five strong, led by the two tracker dogs and the sergeant, headed west towards Acacia Farm village. The other party with four dogs under the captain kept on to the river valley. At quarter past six the four dogs whined to a dead stop by the cold water of Nanyuki river. The lieutenant gave the order. One of the handlers crossed with his dog into the dense overgrowth. There was no scent on the other side. They combed both sides of the river,

but for a quarter of a mile either way there was no scent of the terrorists. The captain was at a loss once more. Had the terrorists escaped upriver or downriver? He suggested splitting the party into two. The lieutenant objected. His hounds were not going to be endangered any further. If the party got any smaller his dogs were going straight back to their kennels.

The captain cursed. Damned terrorist tricks.

A few hundred yards down the river the dogs at Mr Anderson's farmhouse bayed at the strangers. The trained Alsatian brutes did not bark a rejoinder. They sat back on their haunches, their huge heads held proudly in the direction of the farmhouse, panting.

Then the captain had an idea.

'Wait for me here,' he told his men.

He started quickly out of the dense overgrowth by the river into the grasslands. The two hundred yards or so to the Anderson farmhouse took him no time to cover. When he pushed open the gates and walked into the palace-like gardens the dogs charged at him and playfully clambered all over him. They were trained too. They never attacked a white man. The farmhouse was very quiet. Smoke rising from the kitchen chimney was the only sign of life. The dogs trailing behind him, the captain walked to the back of the house. The kitchen door was ajar. The cook was busy at the aged Hoffha stove, a stack of newspapers and firewood at his side. The man started at the sight of an armed soldier so early in the morning. The captain smiled to reassure him.

'Good morning,' he said to the cook.

'Bwana in bed,' the house servant told him.

The captain understood.

'Telephone,' he told the cook, speaking into his hand for demonstration, 'I want to use the telephone. Telephone.' The servant in turn understood.

'Come,' he said and led the way through a corridor to the dark sitting-room.

He pulled back the curtains and pointed to the black telephone on a coffee table. Then he stepped back to watch the white stranger.

The captain rang base. A truckload of soldiers had just left to reinforce him. He would need another truckload. The sergeant-major back at camp would try, but by gum, it was not going to be

easy to rustle up a section just like that. Where did he want the reinforcements delivered? To the Liki crossing. Very well, but it was not going to be easy.

'Just get them over there and quick,' the captain said impatiently.

'Yes, sir.' The sergeant major hung up on him.

He swore. Then he rang the police station. He wanted them to cover the Liki and Nanyuki river bridges, just in case. He was sending them a load of troopers to help out.

He dispatched the fresh soldiers to the ambush. It was 6.45 am. It was very unlikely that Haraka was on this side of the forest. He was a nightbird, strictly. But his era was drawing to a close. His days were numbered.

October 23rd was not so far off. And the net was being staked out.

The villagers sat naked in a semicircle round the fire. Their frightened eyes reflected the flickering fire, showing like a lot of dully glowing coals.

General Haraka was busy around them, administering the oath of allegiance. He attended one at a time, assisted by Kimamo. Nguru was out with the sentries, watching the dark Laikipia night.

Suddenly there was a hustling outside the wooden shed and Nguru burst into the room panting. The general looked up, slowly, patiently.

'What is it?' he demanded.

'A spy,' the other gasped. 'We spotted him near the gate. He ran away to the village.'

The general looked round the hut. The villagers were scared stiff.

'There is nothing to fear,' the general told them.

He thought, for a short time. The watchman's dogs whimpered behind the house.

'Prepare to leave,' he told Nguru.

Meanwhile he and Kimamo concluded the ceremonies.

The fighters were soon assembled outside. There was neither the time nor the need to cover up the compound. If the spy had got to the police that was as bad as any situation could get.

He led the party, including the villagers, from the dairy,

heading east across the plains. He knew what to do, where to go. It would not do to go up Equator Valley. That way it was too far to real cover. Nanyuki river valley with its thick undergrowth was the right way.

Half-way to the river he stopped the party.

'Here we must part company,' he told the villagers. 'Go back to the village and your children. Go and do your work. We shall do ours.'

The farmhands were glad to split from the fighting party. At once they went west over the grassland aiming for Acacia Village, their home, their children and the security of Farmer Anderson's farm guards. One villager hesitated. Wambugu the dairy watchman was afraid. Fear of terrorists, soldiers, fighting and death told him to follow the other villagers, but reason urged him against that. He did not belong to the village at night. His place was at the dairies with his dogs. But he dared not go back there. If the soldiers came ...

The villagers' party had vanished into the darkness.

'Come with us,' the general told him.

The party of fighters moved across the western road and down to the river. Then, using the age-old escape ruse, the gang waded the ice-cold water of the Nanyuki and waded upriver. Nobody noticed the cold. They understood. A cold river was warmer than a cold bullet, any time. One mile upstream and directly behind the district hospital they waded out of the river and passed behind the P.W.D. camp. They crossed Lunatic Lane and walked the three-quarters-of-a-mile to Liki river in the north. Haraka sighed a sigh of relief as his troops trekked up along its banks. Liki river and its forest were the highway home. The most direct route to safety. He could walk it with his eyes closed. He had done so before.

The flight back to the forest was executed quickly and efficiently, true to the general's reputation. By daybreak, the gang was less than three miles from their bamboo base. At noon they were settled back in their home base and lunch was roasting. It was mainly deer meat collected from the snares on the way up the mountain and maize picked from the gardens belonging to the people of Pinewood Forest Station. The tired fighters rested, some asleep in the huts, others out in the compound.

In his hut the general sat on one of his steel cases cleaning his precious guns. His movements with the rag were smooth, soft and co-ordinated. His face had that blank expression, only now there was a shade of satisfaction on it. He was at peace. At peace with his conscience, himself, his fighters and the villagers. The greatest part of his endeavour was now over and done with. The villagers all through the saw mills, Ontulele Forest Station, the farms and especially Acacia Ranch were on his side. He had sworn them to side with him and that was peace. It meant that now he had only one enemy, one real enemy, to fight. The soldiers. He would fight them any time now. There was only one party left unsworn. That little group out at Pinewood had yet to be dealt with. But there was a lot of time for that. October 23rd was still six days away. Yes, he would fix them all right. He would do that in two days' time. Then after that he would draw back and let the white soldiers find him and fight him. He slapped back the magazine.

Kimamo was standing in front of him with a calabash of roast venison.

7

Rain came suddenly out of the thick jungle and strafed the convoy with giant hailstones. They rattled the canvas roof of the Land-Rover in a continuous roll as the vehicle followed the three-tonners along the forest road. The newly fixed permanent-grip wheels dug into the sticky mud as the vehicle proceeded up the road. The rain came down heavier, though the wipers were already working overtime. They crossed the Nanyuki river bridge and headed up the worsening road. The driver by his side sat smoking quietly while the captain wrestled with the wheel. The Land-Rover's speed was reduced to a sliding crawl in order to avoid landing in the deeper, softer mud at the side of the road.

The storm worsened. Lightning flashed, thunder crashed and a driving wind brought the rain down the forest road in a murky downpour. The wipers could hardly keep going and the visibility was reduced to only a few feet. The captain switched on the lights and managed to crawl a few more yards. The gullies by the side of the road were now fast-moving rivulets, red with mud and increasing in size every moment. If the Land-Rover slipped into any of them, that would be the end of the journey for them. The captain surrendered the wheel to the more experienced driver. Then he lit himself a Rex and leaned back to watch the soldier's efforts. The driver nursed the familiar controls and coaxed the reluctant machine forward. It roared, jerked a few times and swerved to the left. He swung the wheel back and brought the vehicle back on the road. A few more yards up the track visibility became nil. A hailstorm had come to reinforce the deluge. The hailstones beat a monotonous rhythm on the roof of the Land-

Rover and on the screen. The wipers could not keep up. The driver stopped the vehicle, engaged the handbrake and shook his head.

‘No use, sir,’ he said hopelessly. ‘Too damned bad.’

Captain Kingsley looked out of the window into the cold forest. Lightning cut across the troubled sky and thunder shook the forest. That kind of rain never lasted long. He looked at his watch. It was five o’clock. He shook his head. The tropics! One minute scorching hot and the next raining rocks.

‘It will be over soon,’ he said to the driver, reaching over and switching off the headlamps.

He sat back to wait for the tempest to die down. It took one hour of thunder and lightning and six Rexes for the storm to spend itself. Then it retreated back up the mountain to wherever it had hailed from, leaving behind only a slight shower which was nothing to its predecessor.

Darkness was falling. The forest all around was cold, dark and silent. The streams by the roadside hummed happily on their way down to Nanyuki river. Up the road as far as the first bend the road was deserted. The driver restarted the engine and released the handbrake. Then he set the vehicle into first gear.

‘Here we go again,’ he said to himself and eased the Land-Rover forward.

The rain had washed the worst of the mud off the surface of the road into the gullies. The vehicle had a better grip than before. They drove slowly up the road. The driver switched on the headlights and concentrated on keeping the Land-Rover in the middle of the road. Captain Kingsley wondered how the trucks had managed to move this far before the storm fell. Had they made it to the village yet? Hardly likely. They would make it tonight though. Before the storm regained its original fury and came back down the mountain causing havoc, they would make it to the village.

They came to the bogged-down convoy two miles down the road from the forest station. The captain’s Land-Rover drew up behind the last truck.

Lieutenant Peters came down to report.

‘The radio car is stuck fast in front,’ he said. ‘Slipped into the gully, sir.’

Captain Kingsley got out of the Land Rover on to the soft mud. 'I thought as much,' he murmured, almost to himself. 'Something was bound to go wrong. Let's have a look at it.'

They moved along beside the stalled lorries. The troopers on top looked cold and miserable. Their cigarette ends showed deep red in the ever-increasing darkness.

At the head of the convoy they came to the Land-Rover. It had skidded into the right-hand side gully and its back wheels were completely submerged in the slush. It could not pull itself out of that position. The captain looked it over and shook his head. The machine could not be recovered before the flood in the gully fell or dried up completely. That would not be until the following morning. And they could not just stay there, only two miles from Pinewood Forest Station, their destination. He studied the situation again. There was just about enough room for a truck to squeeze through. The Rover's front wheels and the cab were the only parts of the vehicle blocking the passage of the other vehicles. It would take a man who knew what he was doing to get a truck through the gap without sliding into the gully on the left or crashing into the little radio car. He had such drivers with him.

'We shall have to abandon the radio car until tomorrow,' he said to the lieutenant.

'Here?' the other asked, surprised.

Captain Kingsley nodded.

'If we can't take it, it can't be stolen,' he said. 'Nobody around here would want to steal it, anyway.'

Darkness had almost totally enveloped them by now. 'Four men, lieutenant,' he said.

The lieutenant called the orders. Four soldiers jumped off the nearest truck. With their help, the Land-Rover was shoved sideways so that the whole lay in the waterlogged ditch. It settled heavily into the soft mud at the bottom. The larger part of the road was now clear.

The soldiers hopped off the leading lorry. The driver manoeuvred it through and slowly headed up the road. Three hundred yards away he stopped to wait for the others. The next troop-carrier made it through to the first. The following, heavier supply truck was harder to manipulate through the mire left

behind by the first two lorries. It inched slowly through the gap. Just as it was getting through, the back wheels slid to the right. The driver swung the wheel in an effort to correct the swerve and save the Land-Rover from certain doom. Everybody held their breaths. The truck swerved back to the road and shot across to the opposite side. The rear wheels plunged into the gully and the body crashed into a telephone post. The post flew to the ground with zinging, breaking wires. A few cases of ammunition tore through the canvas and landed in the wet bush.

For a long moment no one spoke.

'Damn it,' Lieutenant Peters broke the spell.

Captain Kingsley sighed.

'That's that,' he said.

The truck now covered half the left-hand side of the road. There was no going anywhere with the vehicles that night. An attempt to squeeze another truck through the gap could be fatal. Up the road, the two trucks that had made it stood waiting. Down the road the others also waited. Lieutenant Peters waited for orders.

'We shall spend the night here.' The captain squinted into the drizzly evening. 'Go up to the village tomorrow morning.'

He retraced his steps in the gloom to his Land Rover.

Lieutenant Peters started issuing instructions and posting sentries. Everybody was on the move around the trucks.

Captain Kingsley sat in his Land-Rover smoking and thinking.

Unknown to anyone, up in the dark mountain jungles another hailstorm crept warily down through the forest towards Pinewood Forest Station for another onslaught. Dark, cold and silently menacing, the storm glided down the mountain.

Old Mwaniki sat at one end of the hut, his wise old eyes absorbing all that was going on in the hut. The ceremonies were nothing new to him, but after many nights of sitting by the fire alone it was entertainment. The fire flickered brightly, long tongues that lit up the frightened faces of the villagers as well as the faces of the general and his assistants. The rituals were repeated with every group of villagers with an interesting monotony.

General Haraka wore his usual passive mask and his lieutenants looked calm and efficient.

'Anyone left?' the general asked.

'Three more huts,' Lieutenant Nguru answered. 'Just behind the chief's post.'

'Careful,' Haraka cautioned.

Nguru led the band of already sworn-in villagers from the hut. Outside they were joined by an escort of forest fighters. They crossed the dark, cold, wet village silently back to their huts. When the villagers were safely locked back in their huts the fighters proceeded to knock on the last doors. This was done silently and carefully according to the general's instructions. Someone on a bed in the last hut turned over at the coded knock.

'Who is it?' he asked quietly.

'It is a bush,' Nguru answered.

'What kind of bush?'

'A night bush,' the forest fighter told him.

There was more movement inside the hut. A bed creaked.

'Wake up, all,' the voice said. 'They have come.'

Some people yawned. Then the bolt shot noisily back and the door creaked open. The uncoiled hinges creaked so loudly that the forest fighters looked around instinctively. They peered hard into the darkness, but even their trained eyes failed to pick out the naked man.

Njoro, the chief's corporal, had come out of his hut to urinate. He was dressed only in slippers and was opposed to the idea of crossing the cold, wet patch of grassland in front of his hut to the latrine. He walked carefully under the eaves of his hut to the back. Standing there naked, he started to urinate. But as the first drop of urine hit the ground he heard the soft whispers. The liquid ceased in its movement and he stood listening. More voices followed, then the creak of a rusty hinge. Fear urged him to go back to his hut, but curiosity was stronger. Slowly, on slightly trembling legs, he approached the source of the sound of voices. He saw the dark people assembled in front of the hut directly behind his. He stopped to watch. More people came out of the hut and joined the gang. Then the lot of them walked away in the direction of the village.

Corporal Njoro stood undecided. On curfew nights no one was supposed to venture outside their huts. And no one was expected to be going anywhere in a party except the village patrol. And even then the village patrol did not go out much on such a

miserable night. Njoro knew this very well. He was on duty that night. He rushed back into the hut and put on his heavy black greatcoat. He picked up his rifle from near the door and went out again into the night. He followed the dark party through the night from hut to hut. He was not very frightened. He had a rifle. And as far as he knew, nobody in the village carried arms except the authority and Mr. Jackson.

He followed the gang through the village to old Mwaniki's hut. He stopped under the eaves of the furthest hut and watched them go in one by one. He knew it was Mwaniki's hut. Mwaniki the chief's father-in-law. And if there was one person the chief would have been glad to get rid of, if only he had a genuine reason, that one man was old Mwaniki. It was rumoured, but only rumoured, that Mwaniki was a supporter of Mau Mau, of Haraka. Haraka! Corporal Njoro watched the last three men enter the hut. In the momentary light of the fire in the hut he saw their long hair, their ragged clothes, and the rifles and machetes. At the sight of these men and the thought of Haraka, the urine that had frozen in his system thawed out and warmed its wet way down his legs.

He retraced his way slowly, silently on trembling legs, glancing back every now and then. When he was safely out of earshot, he ran. A few huts up the pathway he slipped and crashed to the ground losing his rifle in the dark. He nearly screamed with fear and could have sworn that someone had tripped him. He got up on his hands and knees and looked around. As far as he could see in the dark, nothing moved. Frantically, he searched in the wet grass for his rifle. He found it and walked the rest of the way back to his hut, thinking as he went.

For a long time he had been trying to get the chief to give him another chevron, without success. He still wanted to be a sergeant. The chief would be delighted to hear that there were terrorists in his father-in-law's house. A good excuse to get rid of the troublesome old man. Maybe he could kill a few terrorists too and get commendation from the D.C. Maybe kill Haraka too, if he was in the hut. The corporal sincerely hoped that Haraka was nowhere near the village and that that was not his gang in the village. He did not want to have anything to do with Haraka.

never. He would gladly forfeit the chevron rather than go after Haraka, but the chevron!

He walked into his hut and started dressing. He was on patrol duty tonight. If anything went wrong tonight and the chief got wind of it the following day, he would not only fail to make the extra stripe, he would also lose the two he already had. He might even be sacked and sent into detention.

He finished dressing, took his rifle and went out again. He crossed the camp compound to the chief's hut. The chief was snoring loudly within. The corporal had to knock on the door several times before the bed creaked.

'Who is it?' a woman's voice enquired.

'It is I, Njoro,' he told her.

The woman hesitated.

The snoring continued.

'What do you want?' she asked.

'The chief,' the corporal answered. 'I want to talk to him.' The bed groaned some more as she shook her husband awake. Then the snoring choked off and the chief grunted.

'Wake up,' the woman said. 'Njoro wants to see you.'

He yawned loudly.

'Who?' he asked her.

'Njoro,' she said. 'Your home-guard.'

There was a pause.

'What do you want?' the chief called from his bed. Njoro hesitated. He could not shout out the chevron deal with everybody and the whole night listening.

'Chief,' he said uncertainly. 'It is I, Njoro. I want to talk to you, chief.'

'What about?' Chief Kahuru demanded.

'About ... about tonight's patrol, chief,' Njoro explained. 'It is urgent, chief,' he added.

The chief paused. He was reluctant to leave his bed. Then, slowly, he got out of the bed and slipped on the greatcoat. With a lot of puffing and sleepy yawning, he crossed the floor to the door. Somewhere along the way he kicked a tin pot; the loud noise made Njoro jump and look around.

'How many times must I tell you not to leave things lying about?' the chief asked his wife.

She did not answer.

The bolt shot back and the door opened, just a crack, it is only I,' Njoro said. The door opened wider.

'Well?'

The corporal hesitated. He had no idea where to start. He opened his mouth, closed it and decided to change the approach.

'Have you considered, chief?' he asked.

'Considered what?'

'You told me you would, chief.'

The chief thought.

'I don't understand you.'

'Don't you remember what I wanted?'

The chief shook his head in the dark.

'No.'

Njoro lowered his voice. 'The sergeant's stripe, chief?' The chief swore.

'If you called me out of bed at this hour to tell me this ...' The corporal's voice trembled.

'Oh, no, chief,' he piped. 'I have other matters to discuss with you.'

'Discuss?' The chief's voice was impatient. 'At this hour?'

'It is urgent, chief,' Njoro told him.

'Well?' he yawned sleepily.

The corporal lowered his voice to a whisper.

'It is about ...about Mwaniki,' he said.

The chief looked back instinctively at the dark interior of the house where the daughter of Mwaniki waited in his bed. Then he came out and shut the door behind. The two moved a little way away from the hut.

'Have you killed him?' the chief asked expectantly. 'No,' the corporal whispered back. 'Shall I get the sergeant's chevron now, chief?'

'You haven't told me anything good yet,' the chief reminded him. 'And if I do?' Njoro pressed on.

'Yes, if the information is worthwhile,' the other answered simply. The corporal swallowed ecstatically. The chief waited quietly. 'There are terrorists in Mwaniki's hut,' the corporal said. The chief pondered. 'How do you know?' he asked. 'I saw them go in,' the other told him. 'I was there.'

'How many are there?'

'Not very many. I saw only three or four.'

The chief thought again. A godsend indeed. Now all he had to do was go out there and shoot up the place. Make sure the old geezer got killed in the shoot-up. But there was only one snag.

'Is he there?' he asked.

'Who, Mwaniki?, the corporal asked.

'No,' the chief said, trying to keep his voice calm. 'Haraka.'

'No,' the corporal answered quickly. 'I did not see him.'

The chief sighed thankfully.

'Rouse up the guards,' he ordered. 'Rouse them quickly.'

Corporal Njoro hesitated. There was still a chance Haraka was in old Mwaniki's hut. And he did not want to take the chance. Not with Haraka.

'But, chief, I can't go back there,' he excused himself. 'I am ill. I have got a fever.'

The chief was silent for a moment. 'You want the sergeant?' he asked. 'Yes, yes please,' the corporal answered.

'Rouse up the guards,' the chief told him and walked back to his hut. By the time the chief had got dressed and came out of his hut, rifle in hand, the home-guards were assembled on the parade compound. A too-silent corporal Njoro confronted the chief.

'Can I go now?' he asked.

The chief ignored the question and looked around at the dark forms in front of him. They were too few for a complete job. Just too few. 'Is everybody here?' he questioned. 'Only the gatekeepers are left at the gate,' Njoro reported. 'Go and bring them,' the chief ordered. 'And the gate?' the corporal asked. 'Bring them here,' the chief grunted.

Corporal Njoro ran off into the dark night, heading for the gate. The other home-guards stood quietly shivering from the cold. Then a light drizzle started falling.

The corporal came back heading a confused lot of gate guards. Then he approached the chief again.

'Chief, can I ...' he started to say.

The chief interrupted him.

'We need all of you on this job,' he told the assembled home-guards. 'Terrorists have infiltrated into our village, our peaceful village. We are going to kill them: all of them. Every single one

of them. They are in my father-in-law's house. Only a few of them; not more than ten.' He paused authoritatively. 'Here is the plan for attack ...'

As he explained the plan, the chief was a changed man; now he was the great Chief Kahuru Wamai, the great Simba, the most feared and knowledgeable Simba. He unfolded the plan of attack in great detail, ignoring the drizzle that was increasing every minute. At long last he finished the instructions.

One detail, led by a fearful Corporal Njoro, started out in a slightly different direction so as to approach the hut from the rear. The other platoon, the one to stage a frontal attack, was led by the chief himself. As they started out the misty drizzle was increasing rapidly and reducing visibility still further. But up to a few feet they could see clearly and recognize one another. They all wore the dark greatcoats that were distinguishably darker than the dark of the night. It was these too-dark greatcoats that gave them away to Haraka's sentries.

At the sound of the first gunshot, Chief Kahuru Simba ducked down, dug his head in the mud and stayed put. More shots sounded. Someone screamed near him. He closed his eyes and tried hard to sleep.

The home-guards found cover and exchanged a few wild shots with the sentries. The door to Mwaniki's hut was shut and no one came out. They watched the dark entrance until they could not tell whether it was shut or open. Someone fired a shot at it. A woman's scream shattered the wet night.

Inside the hut Haraka glanced at the screaming woman. The shot had torn through the thin wooden door and hit her on the left shoulder. Dark blood spurted down her arm. A man tried to attend to her arm, but the hysterical woman moved all over the place, still in line with the thin wooden door.

'Move her over to that side and shut her up,' Haraka ordered.

Kimamo and Nguru stood by him, waiting for orders. Old Mwaniki still sat on his stool, wearing a dreamy expression and listening to the sound of the gunfight outside.

General Haraka unslung his Patchett from the wall-nail where it had hung, slipped off the safety-catch and cocked it.

'Cover that fire,' he ordered, moving round along the wall to the door.

Kimamo quickly threw ash over the fire and stood back. The hut was now completely dark. The general was leaning on the wall by the door.

'I will go first,' he said to the lieutenants. 'You will follow, one by one. Kimamo, you go round to the sentries at the back. See to that bridge. Nguru, you go to the left with the other sentries. I will remain around the front. When the bridge is ready, you give the signal, Kimamo. The villagers will remain here.'

The general pressed his back hard against the wall, his breathing soft and controlled. Outside the shooting continued.

'Ready?' he asked.

'Ready,' the two lieutenants answered simultaneously.

He threw back the door and baled out. He hit the wet ground, rolled and lay still, his Patchett at the ready, peering into the dark rainy night. Nothing in sight moved. Most of the shooting was coming from a little to the left. The rest came from the back of the hut. The whole night was full of the sound of shots and the maddening rain. Haraka started crawling towards the shooting. All round him, rain pelted down.

A stray shot sailed over his head. He ducked and let go a burst of fire in the general direction of its origin. Someone whimpered in the dark. He got on his feet and crouched round the back. In the dark rain he saw very little. Shots flew wildly. He made his way from under the eaves towards the trench. He came up against the wall of another hut. Here he paused for breath. Now there was only a grain store in the open ground on the way to the trench and the bridge. He made for the grainstore. He slowed down to crawl under.

Then came the shot.

The force spun him and hurled him into the mud. Pain waves sang through his chest and body. He gritted his teeth and tried to get back on his feet. The left arm buckled under his weight. His bearded face sank in the soft mud, his cap falling off. His head throbbed with pain. Warm sticky blood oozed out of his side. Another shot came at him from under the grain store. Slowly, painfully, he turned on his back and brought the Patchett to bear on the dark form. He pressed the trigger. Someone moved in violent death pangs.

Using his right arm he got on to his knees. Sweat sprang from

all over his body. The laboured breathing hurt his chest. Then he got to his feet and stopped to let the dizziness clear. He made his way to the trench. There was no bridge. An angry Kimamo scolded the trench guards.

'Where is it?' The general gritted his teeth to keep back the pain. 'We were trying to place it across,' one of the men said, his voice trembling. 'It's dark and the ground is soft.'

Haraka swallowed back a mouthful of screaming pain.

Rain cascaded on them, on everything.

He gave a growling animal sound.

'Get it out!' he screamed.

'But

'I said ... get ... the damn bridge out!' Kimamo stepped back out of the way.

The general whirled round, grabbed one of the men and hurled him into the six-inch-spiked ditch. A scream rose from the dark hell below. A sharp, prolonged, heart-shredding yell that for a moment silenced the random gunshots and stood out even over the rain. Haraka stood frozen by the stirred pain. Then he lunged for the second man. The man fled into the dark night. Giving a hurt growl, the general went gasping after him. After a few yards he slipped and went crashing down. His chest was on fire. Flashing fiery images paraded through his eyes. He rolled on his back. Rain poured into his open mouth, choking him. Then it washed over his eyes, mercifully putting out the fire in them.

Captain Kingsley was shaken awake by the lieutenant. 'Listen, sir.'

He listened. Rain was beating an insane tattoo again on the roof of the vehicle. Lightning flashed again and again, and thunder crashed, echoing all over the jungle. Above the din the captain heard nothing.

'What is the matter, lieutenant?' he asked sleepily.

'There is a shoot-out, sir,' the lieutenant told him. 'Sounds like at the village. Just listen.'

The captain buttoned up his greatcoat and stepped gingerly out of the shelter of the Land-Rover into the rain and mud. He heard it then.

The crash of Winchesters and the unique rheumatic cough of the Italian-made rifles used by the Mau Mau. As they listened,

the shooting took up a new tempo. Then they heard the other sound. The sound made the captain's heart jump with excitement and his body was flooded with heat. It was the familiar rat-tat-tat-tat of the dangerous little Patchett. The general's Patchett. Haraka's Patchett.

The shooting came from the direction of the village. So Haraka had invaded the village after all. The devil! What a night to pick on!

The captain turned to the lieutenant.

'That is Haraka, all right,' he said quietly. 'And you are right. He is at the village. Round up A, C, and E platoons. I am going up there.'

'In this storm?' The lieutenant shouted above the rain.

'They are fighting in the storm too,' Captain Kingsley snorted. 'Those home-guards might be in need of help. And remember, we came to find Haraka. There he is, lieutenant.'

Lieutenant Peters went for the platoons while the captain reached into the Land-Rover for his automatic rifle. Rain fell with an unceasing monotony. He picked up his torch and shone it around him. The trucks looked cold and deserted in the torchlight. Further up the road the lieutenant was shouting. The captain searched under the seat of the Land-Rover for spare ammunition. He slipped a few magazines into the pockets of his greatcoat. Then, pulling his cap lower over his eyes and face to keep out the rain, he dragged himself through the mud and the bogged-down convoy. Up front the lieutenant had the three platoons ready.

'Guard the trucks,' he told him. 'I will take the boys up there and have a look at whatever is going on. I will be back soon.'

'Good luck, sir,' Lieutenant Peters murmured.

Captain Kingsley led the soldiers up the dark muddy road, leaving the lieutenant standing in the rain, alone. The rain grew heavier. A cold, strong wind came with the rain and the heavy greatcoats stuck chilly and wet to their wearers. The jungle rustled with the wind and rain. By the sides of the road the overflowing ditches whooshed with muddy water. And up at the village the crack-crack of the Italian rifles was punctuated by the murderous racket of that damned Patchett.

Guided only by the captain's torchlight, the soldiers slogged the two marshy miles to the village. As they came nearer to the

scene the noise of the battle rose. They came to the village gate. Behind the strong gates to the forester's house the big Alsatian bayed mournfully. No gatekeepers answered their summons. In the torchlight the watchtower appeared cold and lonely in the pelting rain. There was no one there to open for them. They climbed over the gates and opened there, and sped towards the sound of the shooting. They stopped as they approached the scene of the fighting. Some shooting came from towards the ditch. They opened up with their automatic rifles.

The harsh S.L.R.'s thundered into the night, drowning everything else. Screams rose from around. Then the rifles fell silent. The whole night was silent.

The fire cleared from his eyes.

General Haraka rubbed the water from his face. The night was splitting apart into many jagged sounds. The noise roared in his head. Then slowly his heart chilled at the realisation. Thousands, hundreds of thousands of automatic guns seemed to froth in his direction. He cursed. Damn soldiers. Now, where the hell had they come from? And in the shitting rain! He lay still and rested.

The crash-whine continued for a few slow uncertain minutes. The dark and the rain threw everything into chaos. And now even the S.L.R.s, the giants of jungle warfare, coughed less often, as if unsure. Then followed a long uncertain lull. Nobody, nothing, moved on the battle ground.

Haraka crawled to his feet. The searing pain had been washed away by the rain and replaced by a dull, numb discomfort in his chest. He staggered back to the ditch. A dark figure sat desolate in the rain. He placed his hand on Kimamo's shoulder.

'Where is the bridge?' he asked.

'It's gone,' Kimamo moaned.

'Let's go,' the general said after a pause.

'Where?'

'To the gate.'

Kimamo sat still for a moment, then surged into motion, filled with hope and new life.

'Get the men,' the general whispered.

While the soldiers lay wondering who was who, afraid to shoot at home-guards and villagers, the remnants of the forest

fighters regrouped. As they headed for the gate a farewell shot came from a grain store a few yards away.

General Haraka pulled a grenade from his pocket, plucked the pin with his teeth and hurled it. The dark store leaped off its stilts and settled on Chief Kahuru Wamai where he lay with wet pants. The fighters fled towards the gate pursued by the soldiers' fire.

It seemed the skies were maliciously vomiting dark sticky pitch on the village of Pinewood.

Captain Kingsley knew Haraka was gone. The whole village knew. In the torchlight they searched for bodies. There were eight homeguards dead, ten villagers dead and a number of them wounded, a few seriously. The terrorists had left death and destruction in their wake as a token of their visit. But they had also left behind six of their comrades dead. It was a complete job. A Haraka swoop.

Stretchers were fashioned and the seriously wounded carried over to the chief's camp. Unless they were attended to quickly, according to the medic with them, they would never see the light of dawn. The medic, a corporal, got busy with bandages and needles, cutting, extracting and stitching up. The chief's office became a hospital ward. One of the wounded had bled a lot and needed a transfusion. Another required a delicate stomach operation to remove three slugs. At the sight of the wounds the medical man shook his head hopelessly.

'This is too bad, sir,' he said to the captain. 'He needs surgery badly. He will have to go to the hospital to get it performed.'

The captain watched and agreed with the medical man.

'Those three, too,' the medic said, pointing at the dimly lit figures lying on the floor of the hut.

'The trucks are stuck fast,' the captain said, almost to himself. 'In this damned weather no transport can make it up here from the town.'

Outside the hut, as though to point out the hopelessness of the situation, lightning flashed, thunder crashed and rain poured from the dark, hideous sky.

'The chopper, sir?' the medic asked.

The captain looked up and nodded thoughtfully.

'That might do,' he said. 'Airlift the serious ones first.' He shook his head. 'But this bloody place is still hopeless for night

flying.' The medical attendant shrugged.

'Sergeant,' the captain called. 'Radio base for an emergency airlift. The radio should be still working. Take one platoon back down the road with you. Tell base it's urgent.'

'Yes, sir.' The sergeant walked out of the hut into the rain.

Captain Kingsley was left staring at a group of scared homeguards crowding near the door. The gate and the village patrols were manned by the Kenya Regiment. The road back to the stuck radio car was worse than before. The radio vehicle listed to one side in the overflowing ditch. The radio operator got into the Land-Rover and used the torch to find his way round the numerous dials. He fixed the headphones into their place on his head and clicked on the radio switch. The red and green lights came on.

'Baby is all right,' he said under his breath.

Beside the Land-Rover Lieutenant Peters and the sergeant stood quietly. The operator handed the torch to the sergeant to shine a light for him. Rain poured everywhere.

The operator flicked a few switches and whistled nonchalantly while waiting for the set to warm up. Then he set the mouthpiece squarely in front of his thin lips and started transmitting.

'Buffalo calling Dik-dik, Buffalo calling Dik-dik, come in Dik-dik,' he called.

He listened, his face calm and composed in the torchlight. Static rattled in his ears. He increased the volume dial, set the tone dial way down low. He changed to channel B.

'Buffalo calling Dik-dik, Buffalo calling Dik-dik,' he raised his voice. 'Come in Dik-dik, come in Dik-dik.'

Static bleeped and whistled in his ears in a hurtful monotony. He reduced the volume, fiddled with the dials thoughtfully and switched back to channel A.

'Dik-dik from Buffalo,' he shouted. 'Dik-dik from Buffalo, do you read me, over?'

Rain pattered on them and thunder shook the radio with rheumatic coughing.

'Too damned bad, this weather,' the operator said to the silent audience.

'Keep trying,' the lieutenant told him, his voice tinged with a spot of hopelessness.

'Dik-dik from Buffalo,' the operator's bass voice blurted. 'Dik-dik from Buffalo. It's urgent, do you read me, it's urgent. Repeat, urgent, over.'

Thunder roared in the radio.

'Damned hopeless,' he said, turning to the officers. 'Too much interference, sir.'

Lieutenant Peters was quiet for a moment.

'You have your answer,' he said to the sergeant without turning.

The sergeant sighed.

'Right, sir,' he said sadly.

He rejoined his escort and headed back in the rain towards the village. Lieutenant Peters watched the downhearted party leave.

'Just keep trying,' he murmured to the operator.

'It's hopeless, sir,' the operator told him.

'I know,' the lieutenant shot back. 'Keep trying.'

Back in the chief's office Captain Kingsley received the information with a sinking heart. The medic turned to his patients without a word. Then the captain's helpless gaze fell on the black telephone on the desk by the kerosene lamp. Eagerly he lifted it to his ears. As his index finger jabbed for the numbers on the dial, the dead silence of the instrument slapped him in the ear. The telephone was useless. His face paled fast.

'Someone has ...' he began to say, staring balefully at the dead speaker.

Then he remembered the crazily swerving truck, the bang against the pole and the zing of the breaking wires. He dropped the phone back on its cradle and looked at his watch. Three o'clock in the morning. The wounded villagers behind him moaned for attention. The medical corporal looked from them to him and to the telephone.

'The thing is useless,' the captain told him. 'The wires are cut.'

The medic seemed apprehensive.

'Who cut them?' he asked, expecting the worst.

'We did,' Captain Kingsley said. 'Sergeant,' he called. 'Get those men down the road to repair the line. Quick. You know where it's broken.'

The sergeant left again on his odious journey down the road. Rain beat wildly on their already sodden greatcoats. The operator was still fiddling with his 'baby', trying to persuade it to speak,

cooing at it and then cursing and banging it with his fist again and again. At one time he prayed to the helpless machine, begging it to work. He cursed the rain and the thunder and the jungle and the damned terrorists. He cursed himself for ever having joined the blasted Kenya Regiment.

Repairs were carried out on the telephone wires. The men had to fish the broken ends of wires from the treetops. The rain was still falling. The job took the better part of half an hour to complete. Then it was done and the sergeant led his weary platoon back to the village.

Captain Kingsley was pacing the area just outside the hut when they came back. At the sight of the sergeant he strode into the hut and lunged for the black telephone. The warm dialling tone came to life. He dialled base and listened. The distant phone rang for two idle seconds before the sleepy operator came on the line.

'Hello,' the operator said and yawned.

The captain ignored the formalities.

'Captain Kingsley to Lieutenant Harris of Support Platoon.'

'Just a second, sir,' the operator said.

Captain Kingsley clenched his fist.

'I can't wait,' his voice burned. 'It's urgent.'

The operator did not say anything.

Two slow minutes went by before the familiar voice of Lieutenant Harris came on the line.

'Request an emergency airlift,' the captain told him curtly. 'A few seriously wounded victims require immediate transfer.'

'Where is that at, sir?' the lieutenant asked.

'Pinewood Forest Station,' he was informed. 'Do you think Ladybird can make it up here? It's urgent.'

The lieutenant was quiet for a moment.

'I'm sorry, sir,' he said finally.

Captain Kingsley listened patiently.

'The chopper is unavailable, sir,' the other went on. 'Took off for Cinnamon Trail half an hour back.' He hesitated, waiting for the captain to say something, then, 'I'm sorry, sir.'

Captain Kingsley sucked in his breath.

'Recall the craft,' he ordered. 'It is urgent. Send it out here.'

'But we can't, sir,' Lieutenant Harris explained, sounding like a trapped man.

‘What the hell do you mean, you ...’ The captain exploded.
‘Lost radio contact completely,’ the lieutenant explained. ‘It’s raining like the dickens down here, sir. The whole bloody place is lousy with rain.’

Captain Kingsley’s body sagged. He watched the moaning wounded men from the corner of his eye.

‘It’s the rain, sir,’ Lieutenant Harris’s voice bit into his ear.

‘Yes, the rain,’ he said thoughtfully to himself.

Lieutenant Harris groped for something to say, something encouraging.

‘Why don’t you use the road, sir?’ he asked.

The captain grimaced.

‘Like hell, lieutenant. Is the rain falling upwards down there?’

‘I’m sorry, sir,’ Harris hastened to say. ‘Have that machine sent up here the minute it shows up.’

‘Right away, sir,’ the support lieutenant answered.

Captain Kingsley hurled the phone back on to its rest. The medical man was watching him quietly. He lit a Rex and walked out of the misery-ridden makeshift surgery ward.

The rain was still falling, blast it!

8

At dawn the rain died down. A cold mist covered the village and the jungle. The paraffin lamp had long died out and, with its flickering out, the two seriously wounded home-guards had let go their souls. The rest lay haphazardly in the chief's office, a sleepy-eyed medic looking them over every now and then, in the torchlight that was also beginning to dim. Two of them were in a coma, three wide awake and staring with hurt eyes while the rest slept.

Captain Kingsley had not slept a wink. He had conducted two patrols through the rainy village, inspected the gate guard a few times and the rest of the time stood leaning on the door-frame to the chief's office watching the busy medic at work. In less than two hours he had smoked his last two packets of Rex and started hogging Players from the medical man. Now, his rifle slung over his right shoulder, he stood stiff-legged, his body and bones chilled through as he leaned on the door-frame smoking the latest borrowed Players and watching the dawn creep warily in.

First the rain slackened off, leaving a cold dark mist in its place. Then the mist started lifting slowly, reluctantly, and the land lightened. The chilly dark mountain towering over the wet jungle stood silhouetted against the reddening sky. The mountain seemed solemn and as weary of the rain as the jungle and the soldiers were. Then the early morning birds chirped a sleepy good-morning to the dawn, with clicking little beaks. As the sun rose higher behind Mount Kenya the sky became brighter and the mist lifted faster. The village huts were uncovered one by one, but they were still dark and silent. The village then lightened faster and for the first

time the captain saw the village gate clearly. It looked cold and deserted. Above it on the watchtower the soldiers on duty were smoking and talking.

The sun peeked at the countryside over the dark, giant shoulders of the mountain as though trying to gain a foreknowledge of what it was rising into. Its appearance gave the watching captain the idea that if the sun did not like what it saw it would retreat back to where it came from, declaring, 'To hell with the goddamn earth.' It appeared cold and timid, then rose higher and became bold and warm. Steam rose from the wet ground everywhere. The snow on the peaks looked blinding white. The birds took to the air.

Two green-uniformed soldiers trudged up the muddy road to the village gate. Their automatic rifles were carried carelessly over their shoulders. The captain watched them come up to the gate. They spoke loudly to the gatekeepers. One of the gatekeepers pointed in the captain's direction. The two soldiers, their boots sticking in the soft mud, laboured along the drive to the office and the captain. A few feet from him they clicked their muddy boots and saluted.

'Radio call from base, sir,' one of them said. 'They just came through. The chopper is on the way here.'

Captain Kingsley looked round. The medic came to the door, torch in hand.

'Well?' he said tiredly.

The captain turned to the message-bearers.

'Tell him.'

'Airlift for the wounded is being provided,' the soldier reported. 'The chopper will be along in a few minutes.' The medic glanced at his watch and passed a weary hand through his hair. He walked back into the hut. Captain Kingsley yawned.

'Got a fag on you, soldier?' he asked one of the men.

The time was half-past six. Although the curfew was officially up the village was still asleep. Few villagers had gathered enough courage to leave their huts and it would be some time before most of them ventured outside the safety of their dens. The chief and his men were still asleep. They had had an unusually big night.

The helicopter appeared above the jungle to the west. It flew fast, its rotors hitting the thick early morning atmosphere with a dull thud-thud-thud. It flew low over the village huts, blowing

off the loose thatch of some of them. The few villagers who had ventured outside their huts ran back in and bolted the doors. The village was cloaked in suspense and indecisive fear.

At the chief's post Captain Kingsley stood in the drive. When the helicopter came over the huts he whisked off his cap and waved it above his head. The pilot of the steel bird, leaning over to the side, saw him, waved and circled, manoeuvring for a landing. The drive was large enough. With the help of the soldiers two of the wounded were carried to the transporter and secured against any unnecessary pain. A few more trips would clear the chief's office of its cargo of victims. The chopper took to the air and headed back west.

The captain turned his attention to other matters. His convoy was still stranded down the road. He handed the guard duties back to the chief and the home-guards, who were now awake, and led his men through the mud back to the trucks, leaving behind the medic and three soldiers to help with the loading.

The captain was met by a ragged Lieutenant Peters. Coffee was ready and the village patrol had their helping. Some of the reviving coffee was sent up the muddy track to the medic and his attendants. The captain stood leaning on one of the trucks surveying the scene, with a mug of hot coffee in his hand. The convoy, he saw, would take a lot of extracting.

Around them the soldiers drank coffee, smoked and talked away the cold. Those who had fought in the village battle were heard by an attentive audience. By the roadside a fire smouldered.

'Was it bad, sir?' Lieutenant Peters wanted to know.

'What?' the captain stood absorbed in the dismal state of his convoy.

'Last night, sir.'

'Not too good.' He was still deep in thought. 'Casualties?'

'Quite a few. We are yet to know the real extent of the list.' 'Our boys?'

'Nope, villagers, home-guards.' He frowned. 'It was a quick affair. A hit-and-run kind of thing. It was nearly over when we got there. And it was so dark you couldn't tell who was where. It was ...'

He paused with the mug half-way to his mouth. He was staring at the supply truck that had knocked down the telegraph pole. It

sat dejectedly, a monster tamed by the muck.

'Lieutenant,' he said. 'Get some men to move the stuff from that truck into those two up there. The ground will be dry enough by ten o'clock.' He yawned. 'Meanwhile I will take a nap. Let the boys have a little rest too.'

'It was Haraka's men, wasn't it?' Lieutenant Peters asked.

He nodded thoughtfully.

'And the grenades, sir, were they bad?'

'Damned nearly blew us to hell.'

He handed the tin mug back to the lieutenant.

'Wake me up at ten.'

He sloshed in the mud past the convoy to his Land-Rover. He took off his soiled boots, threw the heavy, saturated greatcoat on the bonnet of the car and got into the cab. The air in the Land-Rover was warm in contrast to the chill outside. He laid his rifle by his side and curled up on the hard seat. He closed his eyes and immediately dozed off. Soon he was fast asleep.

He woke himself up at exactly ten o'clock. The lieutenant was coming down the road to wake him up. The hot equatorial sun had evaporated most of the water off the surface of the road. The road was reasonably dry. Steam was still rising from it and from the surrounding bush. From the dashboard compartment he took a packet of Rex and lit one. Then he stepped out of the vehicle into his heavy muddy boots.

His orders had been properly carried out. The two leading trucks stood ready to leave. He inspected the situation again. Everything was ready and the soldiers too. At his instructions a few of the troopers jumped on to the loaded lorries. The two three-tonners coughed to life and slowly drove up towards the village.

The water in the ditches had gone down to only a few inches deep. The radio Land-Rover was shoved and tugged out of its grave back to the road. That too headed for Pinewood. The three-tonner presented a more difficult problem. It was heavier and lay at a bad angle. It took some figuring out even before they started the real physical work. Then the driver climbed in and started the engine. It roared hoarsely and the truck lunged forward. Then it slipped and rocked back into the ditch. The soldiers positioned themselves around it and dug their boots into the soft ground.

The driver played with the controls and then pressed down the accelerator. The vehicle moved slowly forward, then as its rear wheels reached firmer ground and gripped, it rushed across the road. The driver whirled the steering wheel but the truck still ended up in the ditch across the road where the radio car had spent a troubled night. With a little more coaxing the truck was persuaded back on to the road. The captain sighed with relief.

Troops jumped into the truck and it slowly went up the road. Exhaust fumes clouded the scene of recovery. The rest of the caravan followed to the forest station. Captain Kingsley's Land-Rover brought up the rear.

The trucks assembled at the camping site in the village. Soldiers were busy pitching tents in the sweltering morning heat, dressed only in trousers. Lieutenant Peters directed the camping operations. The villagers kept their distance, by the barbed wire perimeter, and watched with curious resignation. Meanwhile the captain examined the village defences, paying particular attention to the place where the terrorists had got through the night before. The bamboo bridge was in the ditch, broken and twisted. A terrorist lay staked out on the six-inch spikes. One long one came through his chest, sticking out about two inches. Blood had collected in a pool around him. The huts closest to the crossing-place were splintered and bullet-riddled. A grain store lay in shambles where they had dug out the chief the night before.

Back in camp the captain rang the police inspector. Then he tried to interest Mr. Jackson the forester in the happenings of the night before. He was not invited into the compound. They communicated through the wire fence as always.

'We have moved into your village again,' he tried to explain. 'We won't be staying long.'

The forester patted his moustache.

'Stay as long as you like,' he said. 'Just keep the hell out of my compound.'

Captain Kingsley stared at the lean, aged tree-man. The giant Alsatians moved restlessly around their master and whimpered impatiently as though waiting for the word to attack the unwanted caller. 'I am sorry, Mr. Jackson,' the captain tried, 'but ten of your workers were killed in the raid last night. Ten workers and eight home-guards.'

‘Thank you for telling me,’ the old man whipped back. ‘Tell the D.C. about his home-guards. Good morning.’

He turned round and went back up the drive to his house. His hounds followed him, stopping now and then to look balefully back at the soldier.

The captain, watching them go, did not know what to think of the forester. The large Alsatians and those damned trees seemed to be the only things the old man understood. People were meddling nothings.

Back in the village the captain rang the District Commissioner, as advised by the forester. He left orders with the chief for the removal of the body in the ditch. In his tent the camp bed and his personal belongings were laid out. In the tented office the collapsible table and chairs were arranged as for a conference. The radio room was in the next tent. The Tactical Headquarters was ready.

He sat at the table in the hot tent to compose an official report to be radioed to Brigadier Thames. He had just finished doing this when the inspector arrived. In the mid-afternoon the sun was hot. A tired-looking but high-spirited chief conducted them to the cell where the dead lay. The bodies were laid out in rows. There was a row of worthy men, the home-guards, a row of not-so-good men, the villagers, and lastly, a little way away from the others to avoid contaminating them, the row of the undesirables, the terrorists. Chief Kahuru Wamai’s initiative. He was so proud to show the dead bandits that he forgot to mourn his dead followers. The cell reeked of death.

The inspector, looking in from the door, lit a cigarette. At last it had happened, he thought. Haraka had visited Pinewood, and there were his compliments to the police and the government: ten dead men. But what had attracted him to the village? What had he come for, and had he got it? Or had he simply come to spread terror and havoc, just so that he might not leave behind anything that was untouched by his bloody hands?

He turned to the beaming chief.

‘What happened?’ he asked.

‘Mau Mau, they came.’

‘Well?’

‘They give oath villagers. Bwana Kepteni. So we shoot.’ The inspector looked at the bullet-torn bodies of the terrorists in disbelief.

‘You mean to say you killed those?’ he pointed.

The chief smiled even broader, a weary man. He scratched his head and wagged it thoughtfully, almost as though he regretted the soldiers’ interference, as though he would have done a better job if they had not meddled.

‘We fight Haraka,’ he made the point clear. ‘Then soldiers come.’

The inspector understood. That was the most straightforward story he was ever to get out of the chief on the incident. The startling thing was that the chief had put up a fight at all. From deductions based on the chief’s previous record, he and his home-guards should have packed up and left the village to mind itself at the mere mention of Haraka. Whatever had driven the chief to face the notorious general? Maybe the world was going mad. Sheep were becoming tigers and Chief Kahuru Wamai a hero.

‘The villagers who took the oath, where are they?’ he asked.

The chief inhaled deeply, blew up his chest and tried to put on an air of importance.

‘They dead, Bwana Inspector.’ He waved his hand into the hut.

‘Who shot them?’

The chief hesitated. He was not sure, but he had a feeling that his own bullets had felled the guilty people. He had sprayed the hut to make sure of getting his father-in-law out of the way. Inspector Hudson, watching him closely, was eager to get the answer to that question. The chief decided to play it safe.

‘Haraka shoot,’ he told the white men.

‘And the owner of the hut?’

‘He dead.’

No doubt killed by Haraka too. The Inspector nodded. He looked round the camp at the half-dead home-guards dragging themselves around, as slow as ever. Nothing was really impossible.

He gave orders for the bodies to be loaded on the police lorry. The group of policemen that always rode the lorry started transferring the corpses from the temporary morgue.

He walked into the village, debating all the possibilities and filling in what the chief had either deliberately omitted or failed to express clearly. Captain Kingsley welcomed him into his tented office. He was still compiling the report to the brigadier, editing it and changing the wording here and there. Brigadier Thames liked reports – any reports – to be short, crisp and downright factual. He had no time to decode any Chinese cipher, and he said so often. When he asked to be told how, he could not swallow why at the same sitting. The desert sands had taught him a few tart mannerisms.

‘You have heard the chief’s report?’ the captain asked his visitor when he was seated.

‘Quite a nasty mess, that,’ the inspector told him. ‘Exactly what happened?’

The captain lit a Rex and toyed with it and the lighter. ‘That is one thing I would give anything to know,’ he said. ‘Only that damn chief can tell us, but he simply can’t communicate straight.’ ‘How did you come in?’

‘We were bogged down in the mud down the road,’ the captain said. ‘Then there was the shoot-up and we came to find out what was going on. It was Haraka all right.’

He dragged on the cigarette. Flies buzzed in and out of the tent like tiny fighter jets. They reminded him of flying shrapnel after last night’s grenade explosion.

‘They should never have come by those grenades,’ he observed.

Inspector Hudson shrugged to dismiss an unfortunate mishap.

‘It was inevitable,’ he cleared his throat. ‘Haraka is a devious one.’

‘He is still at large,’ the captain said.

He paused to drag at his cigarette.

‘But after October 23rd he had better be on his guard,’ he concluded.

He thought about the dark jungles and the crazy rain. Nature itself was in favour of the bandits. Then there was that accursed Pachtett. Wherever the hell had the general acquired that deadly machine from? Little as it was, when turned on suddenly out of nowhere, that thing was most effective. It could melt the legs from under the bravest of soldiers. It had done so twice to him already. And in both cases the buckling knees had saved his life.

9

Haraka watched the day break. First the rain decreased in pulses, then it gradually petered out into a drizzle that seemed to vanish suddenly into the air. The morning was very wet and cold. The cry of the birds sounded chilly and timid in the dense morning air. Then the sun came up and the light increased a hundred fold. The foliage and the dewy bush cut off the heat of the sun and covered the jungle in cold, dark shadows. In the hideout behind him his fighters warmed themselves by the camouflaged fire and cleaned their rifles. From where he was the general could hear the occasional subdued murmur and the click of rifle bolts and magazines.

He stood for a long time leaning on the fig-tree a little way away from the hideout. His Patchett hung from his right shoulder and the Smith and Wesson revolver at his left hip. Every so often he brushed the long wet strings of hair from his eyes and patted his beard. When the fig swayed in the wind heavy drops of water fell off the leaves on to and around him. He paid them no attention. He was deep in thought.

His chest was numbed, the left side frozen. His left arm hung painfully limp by his swollen side, which was bandaged with dirty old rags. Coagulated blood showed on his shirt. His bloodshot eyes were distant, as in drugged sleep. Every now and then cold shivers ran through his solid frame. He winced, held his breath, then let it hiss out through clenched teeth.

Sentries were in position and there was no fear of a surprise attack by the soldiers. And curse them, where had they sprung from at Pinewood village, so early in the morning? It couldn't be that they had started the general attack already. The amnesty

time was not over yet. October 23rd was still two days away. The government troops were known to attack on schedule. They had such a fine timetable, such strict regulations, that had often been convenient for Haraka. Then suddenly in the thick of the night, for no conceivable reason whatsoever, they had sprung from hell-knew-where and started spitting lead at him. Could it be they were changing? Haraka shook his head in disapproval. When the devil changed for the worst, that was the time to watch out.

Talking of changes, it seemed to Haraka that everything, everybody was changing. The weather, that always reliable, unquestioning ally, had started letting him down recently. It seemed now that it could turn awkward any time, even in the middle of the night. Had it not been for that unforeseen storm his troops would have been above the bamboo line by now. But the deluge had flooded the rivers beyond all possibility of fording and he had been forced to make a temporary camp quite close to the village. He had come to this cave many times before when as a boy he had explored all the forest around the village. It was large enough to accommodate his gang and the posting of an extra sentry platoon left the cave even more spacious. A fire could burn in there for a whole day without smoke being observed either in or above the forest. By the time smoke found its way through the foliage it was dissipated into invisible particles.

The approach to the hideout was completely unnoticeable from even as close as the giant fig-tree five yards away. The Liki river was about three hundred yards away to the north and its overflowing roar was muffled by the jungle before it reached the hideout. Now it was only audible as a continuous soothing hum in the background. The bewitched river too was changing like everything else. In the old days one could have found a crossing-point at the worst of the season. Now the monster had eaten away at the bank and washed away all the crossing logs.

Chief Kahuru Wamai, the general thought, he too, he was changing. Now he could even challenge Haraka. He who a few years back had run into his mother's skirts at the mere threat of a fight could now challenge Haraka! He could think of ambushing the general in the night!

General Haraka shook his head.

He remembered the old village days and shook his head again. They had come a long way, he and his Kahuru. A man who could have never faced a woman had become a chief. The abominable, boastful Chief Simba. And he, Haraka, had become a forest fighter, an outlaw and a general. All in a few years. Now the damned chief Simba would be sitting back in his office, very pleased with himself. Maybe even reporting to the white D.C. how he made Haraka run for his life. Counting the bodies of the forest fighters killed must be a pride to him.

Haraka thought about Captain Kingsley, that son-of-a-bitch who had struck him. The general went over the events leading to his joining the freedom fighters. Supposing the D.C. had not struck him. What would he have been doing now? Would he have joined the Mau Mau or remained chief and fought against them? Which path would he have chosen?

A twang of pain swept through his nerves. He remembered the District Commissioner, George Kingsley, tall and proud, lying unconscious at his feet. That feeling of exhilaration, the satisfaction of having struck a blow full of vengeance passed through him. He felt confident and invincible. He was Haraka the general, the Mau Mau general. The governor and his white boys were nothing but a lot of oppressive cowards hiding behind automatic rifles. He would outwit and outmanoeuvre them now. He had done so before.

Someone moved from the hideout behind him. The general looked over his shoulder.

'They are ready,' Kimamo told him.

'All?'

'All.'

'Good.'

Haraka stared into the forest.

'Do you think they will come today?' The lieutenant asked moving closer.

'They can do what they like,' the general informed him. Kimamo nodded.

'They came to the village last night,' Haraka said. 'Against all odds and in the storm, they came.' He shrugged. 'They may come today, they may come tomorrow. We are not afraid.'

Kimamo fiddled with his Mark Iv.

'We could try crossing later today,' he suggested.

The general nodded.

'If it does not fall soon,' he remarked, 'we could stay here for days. There is no trail to lead the soldiers here. They will have to bump into us by accident. We shall be ready.'

Kimamo looked down at his ragged muddy clothes. It was evident to the general that he was for a fast withdrawal. And the sooner the better. The fighting had reached a turning-point, one that was not in the least in their favour. Great changes were afoot.

'I wish we could leave now,' he murmured. 'Now!'

The general looked him up and down and pushed the hair off his own face. His body was getting hot. He hoped it was not a fever.

'There is no hurry,' he said quietly. 'We have enough men, enough guns, enough food. We could hold our own.'

Kimamo shifted his feet.

'Maybe we could find a place to cross now,' he said casually.

General Haraka was silent for one full minute while his lieutenant held his breath, waiting. Maybe Kimamo was right about the urgency of the matter, but trying to cross the Liki in the flood was just as perilous as waiting for the government forces, maybe even more so. It just could not be done without a certain risk to the gang. Then he spoke:

'When the right time to leave comes,' he said evenly, 'I will give the order.'

Then he turned round and went off into the cave, leaving a frustrated lieutenant cursing himself for ever having pressed the point.

It was darker in the cave. He paused at the entrance, looking round the hideout. The fighters were ready putting finishing touches to their rifle cleaning. They stopped to look at his wounded side. He took a cleaning-rag from one of the men and sat on the bare floor by the door. His Patchett lay on his lap. Using one arm, as far as possible, he yanked out the slim magazine and laid it by his side. He started cleaning the gun slowly and thoughtfully. It was a painful job. His eyes misted and he clenched his teeth. But his men were watching him, expecting him to manage, so he did.

He was almost through cleaning the gun when Kimamo entered the hideout, and looked round. Spotting the general, he

walked to him and stood by him. The general noticed him come but kept his undivided attention focused on his work. Kimamo stood nervously waiting. The general did not want to talk to him about the crossing again. When he spoke his voice was cold and strained.

'What is it?' he demanded.

Kamamo hesitated.

'Two villagers.'

Haraka made no sign of having heard.

'They just came in.' The tone of urgency was quite unsuccessfully suppressed.

'What do they want?' 'They want to see you.' 'About what?'

Kimamo fretted and chose his words carefully. 'It's ... personal ... urgent.'

The general was quiet. More volunteers from Pinewood! More recruits, more problems and in this kind of atmosphere! New men, in the hard times that were coming, meant weaknesses in the defence. They just could not take on new men.

'Tell them to go back to the village,' he said.

Kimamo's voice broke.

'They can't, general,' he insisted.

Haraka caught his breath in pain. The shiver nearly showed.

'Let them try.' 'But they just ...'

Haraka's hands froze on the gun, gripping tightly. He sat still, sitting on his rage. He was sick and fed up by the lieutenant questioning his decision. This was going too far.

'That is an order, Kimamo.' He spoke so quietly that only the person addressed could hear him. 'My order.'

Kimamo wrung his hands. The other forest fighters in the cave secretly listened while seemingly engrossed in their gun-cleaning.

'General,' Kimamo said hoarsely. 'They are from Acacia Ranch.'

The general froze again. He looked up ever so slowly into the urgent eyes of the other man. Kimamo nodded.

Haraka snapped the magazine back into the Patchett and painfully rose. The two walked out of the hideout.

The villagers stood at the fig-tree, one of the sentries keeping guard over them. They looked ragged and tired. Haraka

recognized one of them instantly as coming from the farm. He stood in front of them, looking from one pair of exhausted eyes to the other. Whatever had brought the two there, he felt it was not merely the zeal for fighting. They seemed too afraid to speak.

'Well?' he encouraged them, forgetting his pain for the moment.

The two farmhands looked at one another before the elder of the two spoke.

'They came, Haraka,' he said.

Haraka gave him time to realise that he had told him nothing.

'Soldiers,' the old man went on. 'Lots of them, with dogs and guns. In the morning, very early after you left. They rounded up the village. The police came. They beat up some of us and arrested the others.'

Haraka felt something move inside him. 'And Karuri?' he asked the foreman.

'They flogged him. In front of the whole village. They wanted him to say who had been to the dairy. He said nothing. They beat him unconscious, then drove him off in a Land-Rover. Then the homeguards said they knew who.'

Haraka's hands balled into fists. The home-guards again! The damned bastards, the devils! He had a feeling they had betrayed him that time at the dairy. The eavesdropper!

'We were lined up in front of them. The home-guards picked out most of them. They missed us two. The others were beaten, put into trucks and driven off. And the D.C. was there too. He beat up his home-guards and had them arrested. They left the police to guard the village. We knew somebody would remember us two when they were beaten. We ran into the forest. We came.'

Haraka turned his back to them and stood staring into the forest. The storm had broken sooner than he had expected. Already a series of misfortunes had struck at his territories. And it was only October 21st. The spy out at Acacia Dairy could have been one of the home-guards. Who had spied on him at Pinewood, a villager or another home-guard? The forces of bad omen were crowding him, forcing him into a tight corner, into inactivity. Here he was, holed up, unable to retreat up the mountain, frozen on the spot, while his enemies tramped down all the loyalty, all the faith, everything he had built within the last three weeks.

Turning so much work into nothing.

The sun was shining bright and hot. Patches of sunlight dodged through the jungle ceiling to the thickets around them. Birds went about their daily chores, oblivious of the general and his problems. From far air the Liki roared sarcastically, reminding the general that it held the bridle, that he could not ride back to his bamboo camp today or tomorrow. Not any time he wanted at all. He could only do so if and when the river chose to let him.

He turned to the villagers. Two, three days lost in the forest. They looked hungry and weak and wet.

'Give them some food and fire,' he said to Kimamo.

Kimamo led the two thankful villagers towards the hideout. The sentry hesitated, then walked off back to his duty. A hornbill came crackling through the forest and vanished into the leaf age of the fig-tree above.

General Haraka stood with his hands behind his back, his Patchett hanging from his shoulder. He was tense and a little nervous. Even more, now, he could feel the forces, his enemies, closing in on him. The rivers, the home-guards and the soldiers. The soldiers! He remembered the amnesty. The vultures were hovering, waiting, hovering and waiting for his carcass. Only two days to go and they were soaring lower, closer to his life. Yes, they were coming, and this time, he felt, they were serious. From his mind a numbness stemmed, spreading its roots through him, chilling him as did a night storm. And through the storm he heard the deathly rattle of automatic rifles and the whine of bullets. And this goddamn wound.

His eyes stared unseeingly into the forest. His body was cold and hot at the same time. His eyes stared blankly into the darkness, pitch darkness that had nothing in it but cold and the Thing that stalked him. He felt it slowly crawling towards him, watching him and crouching ready to leap. He peered into his mind but could neither see the Thing nor hear the sound it made. All he heard was the sound of the birds and the wind in the trees above him.

His mind wandered to the past and the little general he had succeeded. He heard the little man talk of freedom and land and peace. He remembered his talk of other forest fighters in other parts of the country, freedom-movement leaders arrested by the

government. Lots of them, fighters and leaders and peoples of the country. They were not alone, the little ailing general had told him. They were not alone. But where were the others? Where were the leaders? Where were the fighters and the people now, when he needed them? He was not alone! Why didn't they stand by him in the cold darkness and hold his hand and say, 'You are not alone?' Why? And why didn't they bring him more guns and more men and help him ward off the vultures? Why? Why?

A feeling of aloneness chilled its way into him. Where were his supports? When would they come? Would they ever come? Why did they leave him wounded, alone, to fight the soldiers and their automatic guns? Did they know about the soldiers? Did they know about him? Who were they? Did they exist?

Doubt settled on the general, and his loneliness grew a hundred fold. Apart from the little general he had not set eyes on any other gang, any other general. Nobody to give him directions, no news. The guns mentioned once by a mysterious messenger never materialized. And nothing was done about the soldiers, the government and the D.C. He found his own guns and his own men and fought his own battles. Alone. Yes, the little general had given him the initial send-off, the launching with guns and ammunition. And when he was killed, that was that. Haraka was left with no adviser and no way of contacting the others. Nothing. Only a gang of men to lead in one hand and a war in the other hand. Fight the war alone. All the time alone. Yet the little general had told him they had to fight on all fronts. Where was the person handling the other fronts? And when the freedom came, the general had said, Haraka would know. Hemmed in by the flooded rivers, the soldiers and the storm, Haraka would know!

His hands clenched tight behind his back. His eyes opened wider and the moustache stood straight out and aggressive like that of a big cat. His hair fought with the wind over his shoulders. His wound throbbed and waves of warm pain spread through him.

Facing the enemy in the darkness, in his mind he was quite alone. He peered into the encroaching darkness, spied his enemy and recognized him. His heart contracted painfully. Across the infinite emptiness he saw defeat, complete annihilation and death

glaring back at him, preparing to spring for the kill. His enemy was there. Where were his allies, where were they? Would they come to his rescue? The truth dawned on him with shocking clarity. They were nowhere. They would not come and they never would come. They simply did not exist. They had never existed in reality? Only in the little general's mind. There and nowhere else. Haraka was quite alone now. He, his gang of forest fighters and his little war. Quite alone!

The fear in his mind changed into complete emptiness. Then came understanding and hate. He had been swindled and thrown to the dogs. He felt cheated and fooled. The hate boiled up and turned into murderous rage. Rage directed at the little general, the soldiers, the governor, everybody. Mixed with this hate was fear, an instinctive fear, the fear of a trapped beast. He had been tricked into a corner and had his back to the wall. He did not wish to be destroyed. The beast in him barred its fangs in a bid to fight its way to safety. His overloaded mind whirled and nausea flowed through him in the brew of fear and hate. Fight his way out, fight his way out, fight his ... Out to where? To his home? To Pinewood Forest Station? Back to Simba and the D.C.? Never! He would fight his way to hell, to heaven, to the grave. Anywhere but the Forest Station. Yes, he would plough through his enemies. He would blast his way through everything.

The big red eyes cleared and in the place of the confused darkness he saw the face of the District Commissioner, tall, proud and white. White and hateful. D.C. Kingsley and his mascot Simba. The general's eyes bored into the two and his hate was for them. His body was bathed in perspiration as the warm waves of pain and revenge washed over him, periodically making the veins on his face and neck dance excitedly. As he watched the two images the heads fell off one by one. At the sight of the bloody stumps of necks that were left something laughed inside the general. One long ecstatic howl, that mingled with the warmth in his body and lifted his spirits. A hurt, cynical smile tugged at the general's mouth.

Someone stopped next to him. The impish smile vanished instantly.

'What is it?' he asked.

'The river, general,' it was Kimamo reporting. General Haraka

stood stock still, sweat pouring down his hard, haggard face, part from fever, part from suspense. 'It has gone down,' Kimamo told him. 'What about it?'

'Should I order to prepare to leave?'

The general's anger choked him. Insubordination ... insubordination and trouble all the time. He started to bark at the lieutenant and stopped at the look on the other's face. It was not a look of fear and panic. It was one of concern and wariness. Concern for the men under him and the general above him. For the security of the fighters, their fighters.

The general turned away to glare into the forest. In his mind he saw only the face of the chief of Pinewood.

Kimamo was silent for a moment.

'Should I order them to pack?' he repeated, his voice as bold as that of nature itself, the wind, thunder and silence. 'Yes,' Haraka did not look back. The lieutenant turned to go. 'Kimamo,' the general called.

The other stopped and looked back, waiting. When nothing more was said he came back and stood looking up at the general. The other stood still, a symbol of integrity and immovable command, a statue of intelligence and decision with now a slight hue of tortured pain. From the look on his profile, the general's mind was made up about something.

'Yes, general,' Kimamo said.

'Kimamo,' Haraka spoke. 'Where do you want us to go?' The question was so unexpected, so surprising, Kimamo let it hang in the air while he thought about it. He shrugged. 'Your wish, General,' he said.

The general paused, he felt the wound hurting, itching.

'Very far?'

The other nodded thoughtfully.

'Yes, far.' 'How far?'

Kimamo moved his arms to show distance. 'Very far.' he said.

The general said nothing, he was holding his breath as his nerves kept track of a slight feverish tremor.

'The other side of Mount Kenya,' Kimamo added, warily. 'To Meru.'

The general sighed.

'Yes,' he said. 'We shall go far, Kimamo. Very far. Meru.'

Kimamo was pleased. He smiled, looking at his leader. 'Now, general?' he asked.

'No, not now?' Haraka told him quietly. 'Yes, we shall go, but not now.'

'When, general?'

The lieutenant waited patiently.

'First I have got a little business to do.' The general seemed to be speaking to himself. 'An old score to settle. Part of a bargain. Tomorrow we shall leave.'

The lieutenant's face fell, but his protest was checked by the look on the general's face. For the first time he saw anxiety there. Blended with it was exhaustion and what appeared to be disgust. It was only a flicker, a twitching of muscles, but it was there all right, and that was strange. Whatever was going on in the general's mind was not too pleasant. Kimamo hoped it was not the wounded man's fever already.

'Tell the men to pack,' the general said.

Lieutenant Kimamo hesitated, then turned round and left.

General Haraka stood still. Kimamo was right. They would have to leave. Go to Meru, anywhere. Not that he felt that would help, no, but it would be an effort to correct a bad situation. Maybe a futile effort, but an effort. Brave Kimamo was right. Up along the bamboo to the other side they would make it. A flicker of a change entered his person. Maybe he was wrong and there was no fighting in Meru. Maybe they could hide there for a time. But first things first.

He saw the face of Chief Kahuru in his mind. Chief Kahuru Wamai, his playmate, his enemy. Now at last the time was at hand. The time for the final decision. Time to rid Pinewood Village of the malignant undesirable rot that had grown up among them.

Feverish pangs of pain shot through his chest. His body was bathed in sweat.

The sun was high and it was warm in the jungle. It was noon and October 23rd was still two days away. There was a lot of time for what had to be done.

The sun was hot. So was the inside of the tent. The officers pored over the map spread on the table and talked. Captain Kingsley, cigarette in hand, indicated a point on the map.

'The Buffs will start from this area here. At this point here

they will split. The Devs will work along the fringes here. And you will come down on the forest station from this point here on the bamboo line.'

He left untouched the area around Pinewood. He dragged on the cigarette and pointed at the village.

'I shall be here with my boys. You should converge there in exactly three days. The men I have will guard the village and control the operation from there. We have the radio headquarters in the village.'

He paused for a puff.

'The enemy is most probably here, along the rivers or in the bamboo. You give the others a twelve-hour start then strike out. The plan is airtight and you are not going to let it leak. Now listen carefully. This is how you cover your front. The first platoon will be here,' he pointed. 'The second will be along the Liki river. The third will take the bamboo and the corridor between the rivers. That one will be under you, Philip. The last will start from here,' he pointed. 'Each one will have radio contact with base. If one hits something big then base will direct the others what to do, most probably the orders will be to converge. In case of a storm and loss of contact with base,' he glanced out of the tent into the hot midday sun, 'a rearguard will be here. If in spite of it all the enemy slips through and you get to know of it, just radio the location and direction of flight. At zero hours you strike out in echelon. Remember, no mistakes, no bloody waste of time. The search will be thorough, quick and careful. He must not escape. Any questions?'

There were none.

'Well then,' the captain said to the officers. 'Best of luck.' The officers rose to see to the preparations. The captain reached for a report form to fill:

PHASE 2B COMPLETED

He walked out to the radio tent and handed the message to be radioed to the Tactical H.Q. and from there to Brigadier Thames at base. He left the operator fiddling with the machine and walked out.

'The chopper will be up here for you in fifteen minutes, sir,' the operator called after him.

The sun was very hot. A cool breeze came from the west and flapped one of the tents noisily. It was badly pitched on the sloping, rocky terrain. The grass underfoot was hard and sparse. There was a feeble scattering of little yellow mountain flowers. Two hundred yards down the mountain, the bamboo line stood tall, thick and impenetrable. The men would have to hack their way through that. The forest below was a carpet of dark green stretching for miles west. Where the forest petered out, the yellow-brown plains began and spread into the distance, to the hills at the western horizon. To the north-west the Oldaiga Hills lay alone and brown, covered in the yellow-brown savannahs. To the south-west the Aberdares were covered in thick green jungles, lonely and aloof. Two parallel snakes of jungle emerged from the base of the mountain at the captain's feet and slithered their way greenly through the plains into the distance. These were the river valleys. Nanyuki town was visible too, a mass of shining metal in the midday sun. The captain tried to pick out the airfield in the brown plains below and failed.

Standing there, watching the scene below, the captain felt exhilarated. Watching the natural beauty of it all, the unmarred work of nature, he felt the way the Creator must have felt on the sixth day. The slopes, the jungle, the hot sun and the breeze were like a tonic. This below him was Africa, fresh uncontaminated Africa with its jungles, and he could not help thinking about the elephants and lions in Edgar Rice Burroughs's. Had the old writer ever come to Kenya? Maybe when Operation Haraka was done, he would get a farm on the white highlands and live on it. Here there was peace.

Camp life dragged on behind the captain. The tent flapped noisily like the sound of a distant S.L.R. The captain looked behind the camp up at the mountain. It seemed so near he felt he could touch it merely by stretching out his arm. It stood clear and majestic. A few wisps of cloud hovered over the snowy mountain peak like a halo. It couldn't be rain. But Haraka!

He remembered the radio message he had received from Pinewood that morning. Detailed and baffling: 'Terrorists invaded Pinewood, many of them, using hand-grenades, gatehouse and

gate blown to dust, terrorists repelled. Instructions?’

He had thought that over before making his move. No doubt the attack was by Haraka and his boys. Good. Very good. The fish was jumping. It would not do to excite the shoal. They might just be forced to find a weak spot in the net before it was quite woven. Let them jump. When the net was drawn, they would still be jumping. Now that all was set there was no hurry. Haraka was as good as dead.

‘Sit tight,’ he had radioed back to his men.

He stood staring at the great work of nature, transfixed. He was smiling a frozen smile at the white snow on Lenana. And there was a reason to be happy. At least he knew where Haraka, his elusive prey, was. The gong for lunch jarred him into motion. He passed his large hand through his hair and shook his head. All round him, there was a mass movement towards the chow line. Back in his temporary tent, he stretched his lofty form on the creaking camp bed. He still had fifteen minutes before Ladybird came to carry him back to Pinewood, his briefing tour over. He turned over and switched on the portable transistor radio. He lay back listening. According to the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, nothing much was new in the world. The M.R.L.F. terrorists had derailed a train in North Jahole. The Americans and the Communists were still at stalemate in Cambodia. The White House had accused the Kremlin of fomenting revolutions in Latin America. The Kremlin had in turn ... Hell.

He turned his attention to the flapping tent outside. The tent went rat-at-tat-at-at-a, like an angry S.L.R. spitting death at terrorists. Some soldiers laughed loudly. He looked at his watch. Five minutes to go. The newscast was over. The announcer reminded listeners that he was at the K.B.C. studio in Nairobi. Jazz music followed. A lot of croaking. The unmistakable voice of Louis Armstrong came over the ether and shook the little radio with ‘What A Wonderful World’.

10

Haraka stood by the fig-tree, his Patchett in his hand, staring into the dark foliage. His eyes were glassy, his mind full of pain, stark naked pain that stemmed from his side and spread in increasing floods through his body, leaving it numbed. In spite of the hot pain his face was as solid and as expressionless as ever. His hair hung in loose wet strings over his shoulders and the moustache stuck out at the world aggressively.

Thus he stood for a long time. When the pain subsided he thought a little. His mind went a-wandering, and he saw the proud Chief Kahuru. He struck out; the chief's head was falling, falling, failing, and the rain was falling too. Then he heard gunshots and fired the Patchett into the darkness, and the rain was still falling. A warm feeling settled on him and the pain took over from there, leaving him breathless as his mind retreated to the safety of semiconsciousness. All round him fell those last drops of water shaken loose from the trees above him by the wind.

Kimamo felt his way to the sick general. He stood watching the dark profile. He had milked the wound of its weakening pus soon after the general woke up that morning. He had squeezed the ugly lips until the granite eyes watered, and a mixture of blood and water oozed out of the wound. The general did not wince even once. Kimamo, watching his leader, now only saw the familiar still stare that only meant concentration. He stood by the general for a long time, waiting to be acknowledged. Once or twice, he thought he heard the general suddenly catch and hold his breath.

'General,' he sought to break the spell.

There was no proof that he had been heard.

He called again.

The long-distance call took time to break through the hazy, heavily laden senses to the conscious part of the general's brain. And when he heard, his meditating mind came shyly from hiding, dived into the heavy breakers of pain that fought to drown it, and surfaced. His eyes blinked and the moustache twitched. He turned his head slowly and faced the lieutenant.

Kimamo shifted nervously.

'General,' he said hesitantly. 'Tomorrow is the 23rd, General.' General Haraka mumbled something. Then he seemed to think. 'Yes, the 23rd,' he repeated from far away. 'We are leaving today, General?' Kimamo ventured. 'Today,' the general brooded.

Kimamo watched the general and shook his head, trying to understand.

'Should I order the men to pack?' he asked.

General Haraka's hard and tired glare seemed to clear for a second, then cloud again. It cleared a second time.

'Yes, pack,' he ordered decisively before the mask covered his face again.

Kimamo hurried back into the hideout. The fighters were cleaning their guns. He gave the orders to pack and sent someone to recall the sentries for the march to safety. The men were tired and hungry but understood that the more distance they put between them and Pinewood Forest Station the better. Soon all was ready.

A few paces from the giant fig-tree he stopped dead. The general was nowhere in sight. He walked thoughtfully to where he had left him and for a second time his body froze with fear while a strangled cry escaped his mouth. He ran over to the collapsed general. He lay where he had stood, unceremoniously twisted, his left leg under the right and the arm holding the Patchett disappearing under the hulk of muscle and bone. His bearded face was buried in the dewy grass and his breath came out in long-drawn, painful gasps.

A terrified Kimamo turned the general over and looked into the agony-twisted face. The eyes were closed, the lips twitching and the teeth clicking incessantly. The lieutenant gasped. The fever, God. A spreading patch of fresh blood drowned his heart. He tore at the clothing, raising the wounded man's arm to reveal

the wound. It had opened up again. The general had bled a lot. And the medicine fashioned out of mashed herbs had fallen out in a bloody mess. Almost all the left side was smeared in half-dried blood and pus. Some of it had flowed from the ugly wound and clotted in a mess under the belt of the trousers. Now a trickle of dark blood oozed out of the gush in a stream that wormed its way to the muscular back.

Kimamo looked over the prostrate form and realised that he could not carry it alone. He ran for help and came back with a worried Lieutenant Nguru. First Kimamo disentangled the Patchett from the steel fingers and, slipping on the safety-catch, slung it over his shoulder. Together they carried the unconscious general into the hideout.

Kimamo took charge of the situation and ordered the fighters to unpack. They reluctantly did so. The fires were re-lit and the general was laid by one of them in the furthest corner. The men stood agape and staring idly. Whispering started. Kimamo posted more sentries than usual to reduce crowding. On second thoughts he detailed another platoon to collect food and supplies from Gathiuru and Pinewood. He ordered the men to return to camp before dark. Some fighters were sent out to collect firewood and others water. Kimamo undressed the general and had a better look at the wound.

‘Do you think he will live?’ Nguru asked.

Kimamo looked up at him in open contempt.

‘That’s a foolish question,’ he said quietly.

Behind them a group of fighters loitered, trying to see what was going on in the corner.

‘Water,’ Kimamo ordered them in general.

He looked back at the unconscious Haraka. The wound was extensively swollen. The general’s body was all hot and bathed in sweat.

‘What shall we do now?’ Nguru blurted.

‘Dress the wound,’ Kimamo said simply.

The water came in two Sadolin paint-containers. The carriers retreated to their place by the entrance to the cave. They kept very quiet. The two lieutenants warmed the water and started washing the general. A few bits of loose, rotten flesh were picked off. Nguru went out to collect herbs. The green leaves

were crushed, applied to the wound and the whole dressed in the cleanest rags available. Then they re-dressed the general and laid him comfortably on the rags by the fire. They covered him with his old army blanket.

Kimamo stood back and watched the pain-distorted face. The face he felt would never be the same again. It would never wear that all-weather mask again. Already painful wrinkles were appearing on the brow and at the side of the mouth. Instead of the usual fighting determination there now appeared on the face a tortured struggle against subjection to pain. It would be some time before he recovered enough to lead his men again. It would take time, and who would lead the band meanwhile? Slowly, Kimamo felt the burden of responsibility hover over his head and then gradually settle on his own shoulders. He was terrified. What would he do with the men, where would he lead them to?

He sat back by the fire, thinking. How long would it take the general to heal? He, Kimamo could take over command, but only for a short time. Only temporarily. He had done so before. With the help of Nguru and the fighters' cooperation he could manage. As to leading the band forever as a ... never!

Nguru followed him out of the cave. The sun had risen high and the jungle was warm. Birds called across the lonely forest. The ten o'clock wind ruffled the foliage above.

'When do we leave?' Nguru bothered him.

Kimamo stopped, his fists clenched and faced him.

'Why do you ask me?' he stormed. 'I don't give orders to quit. You ask the general. Your general.'

Nguru hesitated.

'But he is ill,' he said. 'He can't even walk. He can't make decisions.'

Kimamo looked him up and down.

'So what?' he asked. 'Why ask me? I am a lieutenant like you.' Nguru fretted uncomfortably.

'Tell me, lieutenant,' Kimamo pressed home. 'When do we leave?' Nguru shrugged helplessly.

'I don't know,' he cried. 'You make the decision. You are his favourite. You have always been ...'

'All right,' Kimamo broke in. 'You wait until I make the

decision then. You will know when I decide, and for heaven's sake stop pestering me with stupid questions.'

He turned round and raged into the undergrowth, his mind clouded with thoughts of his responsibilities. Already they were too heavy for his liking. It was one thing doing what one was ordered to do, but having to decide what to do yourself, being the ultimate voice, the last word, was quite another. Already he was worried to the point of utter standstill. Would they move at all? When and how would they do it? He was worried too about the people he had sent out for food. And tomorrow was October 23rd.

Somebody rustled the bush behind him. He whirled round to face Lieutenant Nguru.

'Why are you following me?' he demanded.

The other man wriggled restlessly.

'Where are you going?' he asked lightly.

Kimamo's hands tensed and he fought off the urge to lash out with his fists.

'Where do you think I am going? Do you think I am deserting?' Nguru shook his head lamely.

'Then go back and stop getting on my nerves,' Kimamo told him. He shifted his feet.

'I want to come with you,' he announced.

Kimamo looked him hard in the face. Then he turned round and continued his aimless wandering. Behind him he could hear Nguru following. They came to the stream and stopped. The clear water of the stream sped by and noisily sloshed on the banks that wore barely a yard apart.

Kimamo stood staring into the cold water, deep in thought. Then a white object in the foliage of a little bush caught his eye. He reached out and took the wet piece of paper in his hand. It was torn by rain and only little bits were legible. Those were enough. 'October 23rd' stood out clearly in black and white. He flung the amnesty sheet into the stream, where it was instantly whisked off and dragged struggling to eternity. He thought hard on the points for and against a possible withdrawal by night. They would have to carry the general. And how far could they get before dawn?

Nguru's question was well timed and consequently did not provoke an outburst from the highly strung man.

'Why can't we leave tonight?'

The other searched for reasons in the stream by his feet. And when he found them he spoke quietly, as though addressing the merry mountain stream.

'We shall have to carry the general.' His voice wrenched itself through his throat, rising and falling with the murmur of the fast-flowing rivulet. 'Any violent movement could be harmful to the wound. And we can't cross the flooded river with him on a stretcher.'

He felt beaten. Every minute they spent in these surroundings was endangering the lives of them all, yet they just could not evacuate. Not with the general in that condition, and with the river, oh God!

'How long before we can move him?' the other asked.

'Two-three days,' he said drowsily.

'Three days?' Nguru echoed.

Kimamo gritted his teeth.

'We can't evacuate now!' He drove the point home. 'But tomorrow is October 23rd,' the other reminded him. 'I know that.'

He knew. The fighters knew too. That was why they were itchy about going for food and not staying in the cave any more. It was unlike anything they were used to, sitting back and waiting for the government onslaught.

'We should have moved out yesterday,' Nguru brooded.

Kimamo said nothing. He too wished they had. He very much wished they had.

And inside the cave, the general's life rode on waves of pain and delirium. His heart beat fast while his tongue unconsciously licked the feverish, mucus-covered lips.

Zero hour fell on 5.30 am, October 23rd. It was a dawn as cold and dark as any other dawn. Captain Kingsley's H.Q. at Pinewood Forest Station was busy. The captain was in the radio room at the Tactical H.Q. with the typewritten last-minute instructions in his hands. He read through them in the light of the pressure-lamp while the radio operator established contact with the operational bases.

'Buffalo calling Hyrax, Buffalo calling Hyrax, do you read me, over,' the operator called out.

'Hyrax to Buffalo, read loud and clear, over,' the answers came back from the various bases.

Captain Kingsley nodded with satisfaction. Then he glanced through the final instruction-sheet and handed it to the operator for transmission.

'Stand by, stand by, stand by.' The operator flicked a few switches on his machine.

The captain reached for his cup of coffee and sipped it. He was the only other occupant of the dimly lit radio room. He lit a Rex and sat back, listening to the rattling tone of the operator and the hum of the transmission equipment.

In his mind he could see the whole foolproof layout. Down west, fourteen miles away, the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers started their trek up the rivers. Fourteen miles south and out at Ontulele the other forces ground into motion. And up on the mountain above, the Lancashire Fusiliers marked time, ready to converge at the word go. He saw it all. The machine, his brainchild, was well oiled and now charging forward into the full momentum that would bring it to focus in the neighbourhood of Pinewood. In a few hours it would be in full swinging force, aiming at the black spot. Its sweeps would leave no blade of grass unturned, its searchlights no cranny unlighted and its slashers no thorn intact. They would destroy them all. Every single terrorist.

At the airfield in Nanyuki, a flight of the Kenya Police Reserve's Harvards and Tripacers were on a 24-hour alert to airdrop supplies and equipment as and when required. At Eastleigh Aerodrome in the capital R.A.F. Squadron No. 214, Vampire jets heavily laden with two-hundred-pound bombs, stood by to frustrate any Mau Mau attempt to break through the cordon.

The captain leaned back in his seat. The pressure lamp hissed contentedly from its hanging on the roof. He closed his eyes, dragging at his cigarette.

'Let's see you wriggle out of this one, Haraka,' he thought. 'Let's see you dodge this one, General.' The operator sang on.

'... call at thirteen hundred hours, repeat, thirteen hundred hours, over and out.'

Static whistled into the radio room.

He flicked off a switch and the set went dead.

'Right, sir?' He swivelled towards the captain. Captain Kingsley sighed.

'That's right,' he said dreamily. 'That is quite right.' He got up. He was thinking about General Haraka. A dead General Haraka.

General Haraka recovered consciousness slowly. It was the sixth time he had done so in the fast three days. His condition was getting worse and the times in between the recoveries were becoming longer. But recovery always went through the same stages. First there were violent convulsive shudders that shook his entire body so badly that the lieutenants had to hold him, pin him down until he got hold of his nerves. Then he lay back sweating feverishly, his lips trembling. They washed his hot brow repeatedly with a wet rag for a few minutes. Then he stopped shaking, his eyes flickered open and they fed him warm soup from a tin mug deformed to form a funnel-like lip. After a short rest his hard breathing evened up and he could talk.

When he talked, the general did so with obvious great pain. His veins were dilated, his eyes having a glazed look. When he first recovered consciousness on the night of October 23rd he had talked in a normal but hazy way. Then as the hours went by, the wound became worse and his thoughts were more clouded with pain. He talked in great detail of things his listeners did not comprehend. At times he talked about his family and called out their names. Then in delirium he traversed the old village days, calling Kimamo's name over and over. At one time they were in school and he talked about books, teachers and his girlfriends of younger days. And then recently he had talked about Chief Kahuru, Chief Simba, and wept, and fought him weakly in his mind.

Kimamo was greatly concerned. Two days had gone by since the dawn of the 23rd. Although troop encampment was reported out at Pinewood, he had no idea what was going on in the forest. His men could not go far from the cave. Food was running low and soon someone would have to go out to the village. And they still could not evacuate. The general was getting worse, the herbs did not seem to help. A slight speck of doubt crept into the lieutenant's mind as to the recovery of the general.

The general had lost all his perseverance and now moaned pitifully, tears streaming at times down his pain-twisted face. The only thing he could quite place was Kimamo's name and voice.

The other fighters he saw across the barrier of pain as strangers. The rest was heat, pain, unquenchable thirst and darkness.

When he surfaced on the third day after being shot Kimamo was sitting by his side mopping the hot brow and holding his hand in his. The general turned his head and looked into his eyes. The general's eyes were clear and stared blankly. But he recognized Kimamo and focused on him. He licked his lips and tried to speak.

Kimamo called for the warm deer soup that was always at hand. He fed the ill man and felt the fever-ridden body settle back in relaxation.

'Kimamo,' the general called in a surprisingly calm voice.

'General,' Kimamo answered in a husky tone.

'Where did I keep it, Kimamo?' he asked suddenly.

The lieutenant thought. No idea what the leader was referring to.

'Where did you keep what, General?' he tried tentatively.

The wounded man did not seem to have heard.

The hideout was quiet. Nguru watched as expressionless as the others. The night outside was alive as usual.

'Where is it, Kimamo?' General Haraka spoke again, this time his voice a few notes lower.

Kimamo looked round. Patchett? No.

'What, General?' he almost whispered.

The general's hand gripped his weakly and clung on.

'The head, Kimamo,' he groaned. 'The chief's head.'

He made a strong-willed effort to sit up but his body would not respond. He collapsed back unconscious, his brow sweaty and his breath roaring out of his throat in a painful panting.

Kimamo mopped the general's brow, laid the hand by the body and sauntered out of the cave. His mind turned slowly, numbed. The cold night air struck him a blow that made him recover a trifle. He stood thinking.

Now they would never make it out of the jungle alive. They were living on borrowed time, and doing it badly. The soldiers would find them there and maybe slaughter them all. Where were the soldiers, what were they doing and when would they come? Would he ever lead the fighters out of this accursed cave to safety? Maybe up at bamboo camp they had a better chance of

survival. But they could not leave before the general recovered. He shook his head dizzily.

The fever had killed all the better parts of the general. Always talking, talking a lot of nothing. And now this one about the chief's head. Kimamo thought about their position; supplies, strategy and the general's worsening condition. His head started aching in concentration. He shook it and placed it in his hands. No help.

'Do you still think he will live?' Nguru mumbled behind him.

Kimamo whirled round and struck out, knocking the other man into the darkness. He stormed back into the hideout and sat down by the fireside, watching the general's tortured body.

The rest of the night passed slowly. Too slowly. Kimamo could not get any sleep for the second night running and he did not try to. He sat by the general and the sleeping Nguru, thinking. He did not know what he was thinking. His thoughts were jumbled up, full of fears and responsibilities. He thought about General Haraka, up until recently tough, clear-headed, a pillar of comfort, decision and confidence. He had led them through it all. From one tight spot to another, and with ease. Now he lay put out of action by one stray bullet, one little piece of metal. And he, Kimamo, as the favourite, had inherited everything, all the responsibilities, all the problems and anxieties.

He remembered the attack in the village, the general mad with pain and the screaming man in the trench. He remembered too how when he thought all was lost and there were soldiers everywhere and there was no knowing how to reorganize a retreat, the general had come back for him through the hell, placed a hand on his shoulder comfortingly and said quietly, lovingly:

'Let's go.'

By daybreak Kimamo had worried himself close to a mental breakdown. He felt weak and worn and his head had evolved a dull ache stemming from overwork. He went through a routine reorganization. Sentries were changed, new details assigned to duties, all with very little help from Nguru, who still moaned about his aching jaw.

As the day progressed, the general underwent a series of changes. He recovered three times more, each time with a

seemingly greater effort. And each time he talked as if drugged about the chief, Chief Simba and the head. He repeated the head so many times Kimamo could not get it out of his mind. The more he thought about it, the more he felt trapped between the general's orders and his indecision. He groped hopelessly for something to do, something to decide, to break the encasing feeling of inadequacy.

Later in the afternoon when the forest was dangerously quiet and drowsy, Kimamo slipped out of the hideout that now smelt of sickness, hopelessness and death. He slipped slyly through the cordon of sentries, crossed the stream and struck out south armed with only his machete and pistol. He walked fast and determined, away from the hideout and the dying general and responsibility. He dodged under creepers, through the undergrowth, and quickened his pace. He did not know where he was going. Only something back in the hideout was torturing him and he was running away from it. He would go far. Far from the hideout and everything.

His flight south was checked by the overflowing Nanyuki River. The river burst its banks and swirled past the bushes along them. Its deafening roar rose and fell in a taunting, frightened whine while its waters stampeded through the bush and headed down the mountain in a disorganized cascade.

He sat down on the wet soft earth just out of reach of the flood. He could not cross. Everywhere he was sure the river was like that. He would have to go back to the cave. The cave and the sick general who demanded the chief's head. He sat there dejectedly and thought of the general and the head. It took a long time and a lot of concentration, but at last he came to a decision. There in the jungle, listening to the panicky roar of the trapped water, he came to a final decision. Since they could not leave the cave to save their lives, they would do the only thing left. They would fight for their survival. And the general, the general would get his head.

Kimamo came firmly to his feet and marched back in the direction of the hideout.

In the radio room at Captain Kingsley's Tactical H.Q. progress reports flowed in both day and night from the four corners of the compass. The captain sat in his seat thinking, smoking, drinking

coffee and waiting apprehensively. He received reports as they came in and planned his next moves accordingly.

'Negative, negative, negative, over,' the reports affirmed.

'Roger, roger, roger, over and out,' the operator said and flicked off the switch.

The lights went off the set.

He turned round to face the captain and shook his head.

Captain Kingsley took off his cap and scratched his head. The search was narrowing and things were not working out too well. Damn it, the terrorists could not have fled already. He walked out of the radio room.

On Sunday morning, 26th, Operation Haraka had narrowed down to the eight square miles around Pinewood Forest Station. This worried Captain Kingsley. Nothing had been reported yet as to the whereabouts of the general. A few terrorists had been wiped out while trying to raid the village and the general was not among the dead. This operation was taking longer than he had allowed for. Soon the Emergency Council would be demanding an official report. Had the notorious general managed to slip away in spite of it all, or was he still at large? To make doubly sure and avoid official embarrassment the captain ordered a slower and more vigilant approach to Pinewood. Radio contact was placed on a twenty-four-hour basis and the hunters were to check and double check every nook and cranny.

Meanwhile the captain paced the radio room, smoked too heavily and chewed at his fingernails.

He waited for his men to bring in Haraka.

On the same Sunday, Chief Kahuru Wamai, Chief Simba, made his debut in the village school where Sunday prayers were in progress. The preacher was honoured to have him in the flock for the first time since his baptism. The sermon was delivered in more than usual gusto for the newcomer's benefit.

But Simba had his own reasons for turning up. Deep in his soul he had a feeling something big was going on behind the scenes. And it all had something to do with his life. Like that last raid at his post, the raid that had cost him five home-guards and his most efficient sergeant, Sergeant Njoro. It was time he had spiritual assistance and it could be found, he felt, in the good old Sunday prayers.

11

General Haraka's illness reached a stage when he should have died. He stubbornly clung to his life, but the illness became worse. The fever increased steadily. When he slept, he turned and tossed incessantly, always mumbling to himself. And when he was unconscious he could hardly breathe. In the new worsened condition he seemed to have gained extra strength. He became more violent in his demand for the chief's head. Ignoring the searing pain, he struggled to his feet a few times, to be restrained by his lieutenants. And through the whole time the only person he clearly remembered was his first lieutenant, Kimamo.

Kimamo was the acting general. He was weighed down by responsibility and lost himself in action. They still could not evacuate and they had to eat. He had expected the general to die at the height of the fever but, to his disappointment, the general not only continued to live but also demanded the head every conscious minute of his life. Most of the time Kimamo sat by the general, mopping his steaming brow, and calming him down when he got explosive. No one else dared show himself to the sick man.

Lieutenant Kimamo sat by the now conscious general, talking to him soothingly and trying to comfort him. The rest of the gang sat in their places quietly. Nguru sat across the fire from Kimamo, looking from the mumbling general to his nurse.

'The chief's head, Kimamo,' the general moaned, his eyes staring.

'Yes, the head,' Kimamo answered for the hundredth time.

The general's laboured breath faltered, then caught on again with rheumatic wheezing.

'Where is it?' he mouthed.

'It's coming, general, it's coming.' Kimamo patted him lightly on the arm. 'They will bring it.'

He spoke out of habit. Not that he had any confidence in the platoon he had detailed that night to fulfil the general's desire. He had sent them out as a last resort. That was the second gang he had sent out in less than five nights. The first one never came back. Not a man. He did not expect the others to, but he had to do something. The wounded general's demands were maddening. Kimamo too had become obsessed with the head and from a great distance perceived it as the only means of their survival. He had no idea why, but he felt that the head was anchoring them down to their fate, the ultimate end. Soon the soldiers would come with their automatic rifles, and with the reduced numbers and an incapacitated general Kimamo felt hopelessly weak. When the soldiers came, it would be a walkover.

With the passing of October 23rd, and the anticipated explosion that never came, the flight to the other side of the mountain lost its urgency. The need to evacuate quickly to Meru District was less pressing. No soldiers had been reported as seen in the jungles yet. The first gang sent to Pinewood could simply have absconded, for all they knew. No one had come back to tell the tale. The second gang could have done the same too. It was way past midnight now and they had not put in an appearance. The atmosphere in the hideout was tense, uncertain. Only those lacking in imagination could sleep and there were too few of those.

Kimamo sat by the general, talking in low tones and praying for that merciful coma to relieve him of his demanding duty.

Outside the hideout, the night hummed loudly on. Crickets screamed, nightbirds called and the hyena cried from a distance.

Kimamo cursed the hyena. It had made its first presence known only three days before and it was fast becoming a nuisance. Like stalking death, it laughed and moaned at the same time, sometimes near, sometimes far. Its ghostly voice rose and fell through the night and startled the general stiff. Whenever he heard the sound he clutched Kimamo's hand, his nails digging painfully into it. Kimamo had hunted for the hyena for two days, intending to kill it, and had failed. Now he sat by the general,

comforting him, while they all listened to the first chords of its distant lament.

Then Njogu burst into the cave and broke the spell. He stopped at the entrance and stood swaying. The fires in the hideout burned bright. He was clearly visible. His face was contorted with pain. His clothes, on chest and abdomen, were washed in a dark substance, blood. His eyes stared vacantly round. No one moved. And for a moment he stood breathing hard while the dark life-fluid trickled on to the floor at his feet. He opened his mouth to speak and let it hang open, unable to say a word. He seemed to wrestle with words for a time. Then slowly and painfully he dragged himself to the centre of the hideout and stopped. And General Haraka saw him.

The general lurched to his feet before anybody could hold him down. The force carried him across the two yards and he stood swaying in front of the newcomer. His shoulders sagged and his arms hung limply by his side. He breathed hard; his mind, momentarily out of the haze, wandered in and out of focus. One minute he had no idea what he was doing, the next he knew the wounded fighter and what he represented.

Kimamo, a beaten man, sat hopelessly and watched the two confront one another, one mad with fever, the other with failure written all over his exhausted body. The whole cave watched them.

'Where is it?' the general growled.

Njogu started as though from a coma.

'Where is it?' the general repeated through half-closed teeth.

Njogu, swayed and his vacant eyes swept through the cave, disinterested.

The general's teeth were painfully clenched and his whole body shivered.

'Where is the head?' he managed.

At the mention of the head Njogu flinched and stood precariously balanced on his heels. He shook his head, vaguely, with no particular meaning.

General Haraka stepped closer, his eyes fiercely burning. His soul hovered uncertainly between here and hereafter, his heart beating a last, fast tattoo. His fists were tightly closed.

'Njogu' he called, almost in a whisper.

The fighter jerked and reeled dangerously. His teeth chattered. Blood formed a small pool at his feet. He stood as though meditating, then wagged his head again.

'We were ambushed,' he mumbled. 'Every ... everybody ...' He wagged his head again.

The general sighed heavily, painfully. A night bird called outside.

'You failed,' the general said, slowly, as though in disbelief. 'Yea,' Njogu said, clutching at the bullet-wound in his chest. The general reached unsteadily for the revolver. 'You failed.' It was a flat statement. 'Yes,' the other moaned, expressionless.

The general brought the revolver to within a few inches of the fighter's face, aiming at it.

Kimamo watched silently, his nails digging into his closed fists. He made no move to intercept. The other had failed and was simply paying the price. He should have known that when coming back. The price was set. There was nothing anybody could do without a breach of regulations.

The hideout was electrified by the proceedings.

'You failed,' the general said a third time.

'Yes,' Njogu said and nodded. 'We failed.'

From far off in the dark forest, the hyena laughed scornfully.

The general pressed the trigger and fell back on the dusty floor, foaming at the mouth, in convulsions.

Kimamo opened his eyes after the explosion died away. With a supreme effort he rose to his feet and mechanically proceeded to do his duty. He did not think. He had performed such duties too long. With Nguru's help he picked up the withered form of the general and carried it back to the fireside. They laid him down and opened the jacket, the only item of clothing the general wore besides the trousers. The wound was swollen ugly. Gangrene had formed and now blood mixed with the dark green mess oozing out to make an ugly sight uglier. A foul stench of rotting flesh wafted to their noses.

'Get someone to carry away that body,' Kimamo directed his companion.

The other thankfully did as he was bid.

Kimamo cleaned the wound with warm water. Dabbing away at the green pus and the blood.

The body of the fighter who failed was carried out for burial by three hungry and confused fighters. Nguru came back and squatted by Kimamo, watching him work.

'The poison is getting into him,' he said unnecessarily. 'The rot is going to his head.'

Kimamo made no sign of having heard. He re-dressed the wound and sat back. He looked round the underpopulated hideout. Some of the fighters were dozing. Most of them sat wide awake and staring. Staring like the lot of stiffies which he felt they would all too soon be. Lifeless and numb like scared sheep without a shepherd. A tribe without a head. A lost clan.

From deep in the forest the lone hyena's cackle rose and fell. Kimamo wondered where the vermin had sprung from and when it would go back there and leave off haunting him and the general. It was a nightmare adding to the eeriness of the situation, while its purposeless weeping formed contorted pictures in the minds of those who heard it.

Someone sidled up to the two lieutenants and stood behind them Kimamo whirled round.

'What do you want?' he demanded curtly.

The fighter hesitated.

'We have buried him,' he said weakly.

Kimamo turned to glare into the fire. For a time he thought, while the man waited obediently. Then, resuming his acting-general's role, he turned round.

'Have the men fed?' he enquired thoughtfully.

The fighter shook his head.

Kimamo could not remember when he had last fed himself. Time no longer seemed to have any significance and personal matters had become overshadowed by the general's condition.

'The food collectors?' he asked.

'They have not come back,' the man answered, shaking his head. When had they left? Twelve hours, twenty-four hours ago? 'Go,' Kimamo told the fighter.

Then he sat thinking. The men were hungry. They had to eat. And had that last party deserted or been wiped out by the soldiers?

'Some more men must go out for food,' he told Nguru, across the fire. 'The men must eat. And the general too, his deer soup is running out.'

Nguru took the cue. He got up and picked three fighters. The others watched, resigned as a flock of sheep being picked out for slaughter.

Kimamo walked out of the hideout with the three men. At the entrance, he stopped. They stopped too, holding their rifles lamely. 'You must get us food,' he told them in the gloom. The men were silent.

'You must not be caught,' he went on. 'You must not get killed either. Come back and bring us food.' He paused as though expecting protest. There was none. 'Be careful,' he whispered. 'Go.'

Not a word, not a sigh came from the selected food-gatherers. They melted quickly into the darkness. Kimamo knew. Those three would not come back either. If they did not get killed or captured they would surrender. The magnet that had drawn them back to the cave and kept them in the gang had rotted away in the general's side. They no longer had that feeling for the cause. Now that there was no general there was no cause at all. Thus they owed nobody any loyalty, no perseverance, no nothing. Kimamo, yes, they obeyed him when he gave orders, but it was hardly likely that they would remain loyal to him under pressure. He lacked that endearing, enslaving touch of the general, that had drawn them into the band. They would never come back. Nobody would.

The chilly night air whispered through the forest. Kimamo let his misty mind wander away from him through the maze of time and action. Here he was, a general all but for the name and capability. What should he have done? What was he, as a general, supposed to do? What was there to do? A general! Letting his men rot away in the former general's wound. Wasting men in utterly disorganized petty assignments. What would Haraka have done had he been in the other's place? Would he have deserted and fled with the gang to safety? Another line of thought. Safety. Safety from what? The soldiers had not come on the 23rd as expected. Was the amnesty a hoax or had the general overlooked something? Was there a slip somewhere? Where? The storm as

anticipated by Haraka would never come. Now, had Haraka been well enough, would he have taken the men into the plains where food was abundant or cut off the chief's head first? Why was the general suddenly so insane about the chief's head, anyway? Why?

The hyena laughed out across Nanyuki river to the south.

Kimamo gave it no thought. How had the general managed to get them through the years? The soldiers had always been there and he had never even once faltered in his decision or made an uncorrectable error. Decisive decisions and complete command of his followers' minds. And where was he, Kimamo, failing? Where? He thought hard. Fear? Indecision? Lack of organization? Which was his greatest failure? His conscience screamed back at him. All! All were to blame. He was at fault through and through. He was one great failure. Failure as a fighter, failure as a general, all.

His head hurt with concentration. He wished the general was hale and sound, leading the band, and he just a-following. He wished they had never gone down to the village for that damned last oath. Why, now, why the chief's head? Why had he defied certain death for so long to keep harassing his men with this demand for the chief's head?

'The general will die,' Nguru suddenly spoke up behind Kimamo's back.

Kimamo had not heard him come. He did not turn, he did not speak. His head still ached.

'The wound will eat its way into his heart,' Nguru rambled on. 'He will die slowly. He has been too long about it.'

Kimamo said nothing. The other was only echoing his thoughts, everybody's thoughts. The thoughts of every thinking member of the gang. The general would die. That was no secret. And the important question was not 'when?' The question was 'what then?'

'The men worry me,' Nguru went on quietly in the dark. 'They are all dead inside. And they will all die completely, going for food or something.'

Kimamo sighed. A painful point that. Who gave orders to fetch food or something? Who but Kimamo himself?

'Some will surrender,' Nguru picked his way carefully through the disturbing thoughts.

Kimamo clutched at that straw.

'And you, Nguru,' he asked. 'Will you surrender? Will you desert us?'

Nguru was silent for a moment. 'I ... I don't know,' he rasped. 'And you?' Kimamo sighed and walked back into the warm cave. For the whole night he sat by the fire, thinking. He supervised the changing of the sentries twice in the night. The rest of the time he sat brooding. What had led them to this situation? Where were they heading to and what did they hope to find there? Hundreds of questions flitted through his mind, pausing only long enough to leave their mark on his soul before vacating it for others. He wrestled with each of them, desperately trying not to answer them, but to play along with them and learn what there was to be learned of them. And they had nothing to talk of but pain, misery and hopelessness. Throughout the night while the others slumbered he was not quite alone. He had a constant companion, death, that hovered over the sleeping general, all but claiming him.

By the following morning Kimamo was totally demoralised.

With his superhuman spirit, the general fought his Way through the coma, sleep and pain. His body was dead, but his spirit refused to let go and haunted his men. His eyes were very distant, his breath hard and painful. He lay panting for a time while Kimamo watched him and warmed the last few drops of deer soup. He wondered what merciless devils kept the general alive, why death refused him.

He fed the general with the deer soup. The rest of the cave was awake now and they watched hungry-eyed as the dying general gulped down the last bits of edibles the gang had. Kimamo felt their eyes on the general's feeding-can, and his body was hot and dry. The last few drops were like the passing of an era, the end of life. From now on not even the general could eat. They might all starve. And how would the general's fever react to hunger? Maybe he was going to die soon. And what then?

His hand trembled slightly as he laid the feeding-can aside. The eyes in the cave followed the can to the fireside.

The general lay back staring. Then his hand gripped Kimamo's

hard. He shook violently, his breath choking him. Kimamo thought the moment had come at last and watched the general with a chilled heart.

'The chief?' the general groaned.

Kimamo's head started aching again. His hand gripped the general's harder. When he spoke it was with a trembling voice, firm in an effort to dissuade the general from his cravings.

'We can't, general,' he cried. 'We can't. He is heavily guarded. We have lost ...'

'The head.' The general did not seem to have heard.

'But we can't,' Kimamo pressed on. 'It's hard. It's impossible.'

His head throbbed painfully. He felt like crying out, screaming and beating his head against something hard.

General Haraka's breathing nearly stopped.

'Impossible,' Kimamo told him loudly, hard, in a resounding voice of steel.

Haraka's large eyes flamed. His muscles convulsed. A little fresh blood appeared through his jacket.

'Impossible,' he moaned. 'Impossible.'

He struggled violently to get up, weakly clutching instinctively for his revolver. Nguru cowered away. Kimamo threw himself down on the general, pinning him down. Helpless.

'It's impossible,' he shouted hysterically into the half-dead face of the general. 'It is impossible, do you hear that?' He screamed. 'Impossible.'

Haraka's fever-heated body sagged. Tears welled in his granite eyes and he repeatedly moaned, 'Impossible?'

Kimamo relaxed his grip and stared into the pools of tears. He was immediately whisked off by his subconscious and transported to the past, to the years gone by. In them he saw a brave, brawny youth, named Maguru Nyaga. A comrade who fought often and never shed a tear. His guardian as a boy who was always eager to beat up the bigger boys for him. He watched Maguru Nyaga grow into a man, a chief, and a terrorist. He saw the terrorist evolve into a general, Haraka. Then he suddenly saw Haraka wither into a wounded, helpless cripple. The crippled general was dying and the tears were real. He glared into the tearful eyes, hungry for the murder of a chief. A chief none other than Kahuru Wamai.

Kimamo's mind whirled into an airless orbit. He struggled for breath and his throat hurt. His head still throbbed painfully and his whole body cried for release. A slight growl escaped his lips and his teeth became clenched to suppress it.

'All right,' he said hoarsely. 'You will get it, General, you win. Your men will get it for you. If they won't, I will, General. Tonight.'

The dead face was broken by a slight change of expression. Haraka could not smile, but the look of peace that spread over his face was enough evidence.

'Tomorrow,' he mouthed. 'I promise,' Kimamo sealed the agreement. General Haraka drifted into a coma, muttering Kimamo's name. Kimamo straightened up, faint-headed. From far off he heard Nguru say in a horrified tone: 'You promised?'

He staggered out into the cold morning air and headed into the vegetation. When his mind slowed down and his eyes came into focus he was standing by the banks of the stream. He went down on one knee and bathed his hot face, hoping he had not caught the fever already. The icy mountain stream cooled his skin and his nerves. His breathing slowed down, leaving only the dull headache. He had no idea what to do next. He sat down on the dewy grass, listening to the careless slap-slap of the water on the banks and the busy early morning life of the forest around.

The more he thought about the dying general, the more he felt he had done the right thing. There was only one thing left to do now. Get the head as promised. He had no idea, no plan how to do that. But trying to do it was more helpful to his nerves than sitting in the cave all night worrying about everything. Now there was only one thing to worry about. And if he failed, if he got killed, better still. There would be no more mental torture then. He felt a little more relaxed. There was a little peace. He started dozing there by the stream, listening to the soothing, carefree lullaby of the mountain waters.

Captain Kingsley hurled the half-smoked Rex to the ground and stamped on it irritably. Damn, damn, damn! They had slipped through again, the bastards. No doubt about it. The tightly-drawn net had too many holes in it, and who was to blame? Every damned one of the blasted troops. They had loosed up. They had left that slim, fatal gap.

The radio operator sweated nervously as he wrestled with the incoming load. Every single one of them a confirmed and scaled negative. Every one. The electrified atmosphere of the radio room was cooled by the innocent hum of the machine.

The captain stormed out of the uncomfortably hot tent into the late afternoon heat. He stood staring into the thick jungle across the trench, hating it, hating Haraka for getting away and hating his troops for letting him down. He hated himself too for ever having taken charge of the giant operation that was now slowly drawing to a painful conclusion, a complete flop. The whole damned thing a failure.

He lit a Rex, staring thoughtfully at the solid Mount Kenya, wondering where Haraka had flown to. Somalia? Ethiopia? Meru? or Siberia? He was a damned revolutionary, some kind of a distorted communist. Hell! Blast them all.

The troops were drawing into the forest station, exhausted and empty-handed. As empty-handed as they had started out. The reports had come in. They were all from within a few miles' radius of the Tactical H.Q. and would be coming in from the final sweep in a few hours' time, before nightfall. All as bare-handed as hell. The murderer could not be in the remaining few square yards. The devil had flown.

The radio operator sauntered behind the captain.

'Radio message from H.Q., sir,' he uttered the words like an expert bomb-handler avoiding an explosion.

'Read it,' Captain Kingsley ordered curtly without looking back.

The operator hesitated.

'Fifteen hundred hours,' he read. 'From open . . .

'Skip that crap,' the captain stamped his foot. 'What does it say?'

The operator started again.

'Request immediate report on the success of Operation Haraka,' he read and snapped the book shut.

Captain Kingsley cursed. That old Thames again. Always requesting reports. He ought to try writing one himself of an operation that did not come off. Always pushing for reports.

He tossed the half-smoked Rex on the grass, grinding it mercilessly under the heel of his boot. Then he started walking away to his tent.

'Reply, sir?' the operator called after him.

He stopped and whirled round. He started to tell the operator to tell the brigadier to go to hell, then thought better of it. His half-open mouth changed the movement.

'Later,' he let fall, simply.

'Message said immediately, sir,' the soldier reminded him. The words bit into the captain's concerned mind. 'I know what the message said, sergeant,' he said. 'Here is my reply: Utterly impossible. Call later. Over and out.'

He turned round and walked into his tent. He threw his cap on the ground and lay on the camp bed. He was tired and sleepy. Hours of little rest and poor sleep, all wasted into nothing. All for nothing, nothing to show for it. The terrorists had staged two bold nightraids on the village, all with devastating results. The greatest snag in the whole set-up was that Haraka was not among the dead. They had grenades, yes, but still the Patchett fire was never heard. Those could not be Haraka's men raiding the village. Haraka was never suicidal. Haraka was the wanted man, and he was nowhere. He was gone to hell and fled.

Captain Kingsley wondered what the camp would be like when the troops, hundreds of them, flocked in that evening. The whole village would be turned into one monstrous armed camp. He had not looked on this as a problem when planning the operation. He had never counted on Haraka escaping and the hunters homing on the village. He had expected there to be a diversion to some other quarter. Well, he was absolutely wrong and soon he would have a basketful of soldiers on his hands to quarter for the night at least.

And damn, there was still that overdue report to sketch out for Brigadier Thames and his urchins of the Emergency Council. For the first time ever, the brigadier would receive his report nice and brief, the way he loved them. The very last word he would ever receive from Captain Kingsley on the doomed Operation Haraka. The captain would send him a crisp and neatly worded signal:

FAILURE, OVER AND OUT!

And if they could not decode that signal, they could go to hell, or go and get Haraka themselves.

Captain Kingsley gradually drifted into a shallow, disturbed sleep, flies buzzing in and out of the open flap of the tent.

At the precise moment the captain closed his eyes, the greatest blunder in Operation Haraka occurred. Four miles up the jungle into the forest, a tired and careless soldier drifted past the hideout where the wounded and dying General Haraka, Kimamo and his men lay half asleep, waiting, waiting for the darkness to fall. The innocent private passed by the cave, his automatic rifle in hand, chewing gum and thinking about his girl back home in Liverpool.

Only the humid jungle, the birds and the trees saw this tiny, gigantic slip and they would never tell. Never.

Captain Kingsley sat late into the night talking to his officers, discussing the failed operation. He was a mad captain, admonishing them all for letting him down. The map was on the table while they all tried to find who among them was the culprit, who had loused up the sweep. All the patrol leaders swore to having gone strictly by the plan and combed every inch of the filthy jungle. This was tantamount to calling the captain a misfit, for who had planned the thing but him? He did not like it at all, and demanded to know where the fruits of their labour were.

No one could answer.

Someone suggested that maybe Haraka never had been really in the cordon.

'Maybe he fled before we moved into position.' A fusilier officer short-sightedly volunteered this opinion.

A possibility Captain Kingsley was not ready to examine.

'The grenades?' he retorted. 'Only Haraka is in possession of the things in the whole forest.'

The fusilier officer shrugged.

Captain Kingsley glared down at the map and chewed at the filter of his cigarette.

'Well, there you are,' he struck the map with the back of his hand. 'Nothing at all.' He looked round the guilty faces.

He felt guiltier than the lot. They had no Brigadier Thames to answer to.

Above the collapsible table the pressure lamp hissed quietly. A stupid moth struggled to break the glass and get at the white-hot mantle.

'Whatever happened,' the captain went on, 'the operation has failed. A total indisputable fail ...'

The night outside was suddenly split by a violent eruption of life. The officers sat frozen, listening to the rifle-shots for a moment.

'Bartholomew's balls,' Lieutenant Peters cursed. 'What now?'

They looked at one another.

Then they heard it. The deadly blumpptoo of a hand-grenade. Then two more. They scrambled out of the hut, racing for their section commands. In the cold and dark night, Captain Kingsley stood with his lieutenant and listened to the sound of the struggle across the village near the chief's camp. He particularly listened for one sure proof of Haraka's presence. And if those were Haraka's bandits, then his own troops had failed him unforgivably. The officers would pay for that.

Then he heard it and his heart leaped. The gun, Haraka's Patchett. He stood glued to the spot, unable to tear himself away, fearing the worst. The numerous troops might have scared the bandit clean out of the jungle. And now that he was on the outside of the net, if they excited him the general could lead them half-way round the world, running, running as always. After all the hubbub and the soldiers coming in empty handed, there was the terrorist, there was their man. The accursed bandit, furiously spitting hell into the villagers' huts. Incredible!

'Haraka!' Lieutenant Peters breathlessly broke the spell.

They moved then. They sprang into the tent, clipping magazines into their rifles. The captain held a torch in one hand. He found his way through the dark, confused ranks to the front. He passed the order round. Not a single shot had been fired by the soldiers. None was to be fired until the bandit was marked out and if possible surrounded. They were to aim low to cripple, not to kill. Suddenly the captain wanted his ex-chief alive.

The bandits were shooting up the chief's camp. They had crossed the ditch this time and the gate was undisturbed. As the

captain watched, two huts burst into flames; strong, tall tongues that urgently licked away at the grass thatch. Men, women and children screamed. Soldiers milled round in the dark background, fell into secure positions and waited for orders. They all listened for the Patchett.

The burning huts illuminated the chief's camp. In particular, his hut. The door was shut. Then they saw him. The Devil.

In the dim, dancing light a grotesque figure danced into view. It sprayed the chief's hut with Patchett fire, then quick as light hurled a grenade at it. One half of the house dissolved into dust and debris while the rest burst into flames.

Scores of deadly S.L.R.'s then opened up on the lone fighter. In an instance he was gone, scampering towards the ditch. The rifle fire pursued him. Other figures tried to follow him and were mowed down by the machine-guns.

Captain Kingsley saw the bandit with the Patchett run for the trench. He followed, firing as he went. Across the gully the Patchett fired back. He ducked and raced to the crossing. A dark rough bridge spanned the village defence line. Using his torch he crossed it. Torch-bearing troops followed him. Lots of soldiers. Something wet reflected the torchlight from some leaves. He stopped to look. Blood. The bandit was wounded, gravely wounded.

More Patchett fire sounded in the jungle ahead. It was distant and muffled in the dark forest.

A hunt was organized. This time there was no waiting until tomorrow. Tomorrow he might be gone for ever out of their reach. The time for the end was now.

And their prey was wounded.

An exhilarated Captain Kingsley led the manhunt.

Kimamo staggered into the hideout and stood at the entrance, leering and shaking his head dizzily. He rubbed blood from the bulletgraze on his forehead. He felt more immediately ooze out. He was badly wounded. Many times. Many places. His head throbbed with pain. His chest ached from the exertion of having run the last few hundred yards to the hideout. His breath rattled from his painful throat and his sides ached. His legs trembled slightly. One of them hurt from a bullet wound. In his left hand he carried the general's empty Patchett.

He looked round the cave slowly, taking in every detail, comprehending. The fire burned bright. A pile of firewood lay in a heap across the fire from the general. Kimamo had left Nguru to look after the general. The watchman was now nowhere in the cave. With dull curiosity, Kamamo wondered where the other lieutenant had gone to. He did not care very much whether the man had deserted or drowned in the stream. He was not in the hideout.

The general moved and sat up. Kimamo was not surprised, and he was not interested either. He was now convinced that the general would never die. Nothing would kill him. The soldiers had failed. The wound had failed. They would all die and leave him mumbling unintelligibly to himself by the fire, only there would be no one to get wood and no fire. He would never die. When they were all dead General Haraka would for ever lie unconscious in the cave, waking up again and again to ask for Chief Simba's head.

He could go and get it himself now, if he wished. They were all beaten. Kimamo was defeated. The last lot of the forest fighters he had taken with him to the village were all dead. Every one of them cut to pieces by automatic fire that seemed to pour from hell. God. Kamamo had never thought so many soldiers existed anywhere on earth, so many guns. They had poured out from nowhere and everywhere, turning his well-planned night expedition to Pinewood into a complete muddle. A devastating mix-up. He faintly remembered hearing his men fire. He remembered in a haze seeing huts on fire and the chief's hut dancing into ruins. The automatic rifles had opened up, roared and dominated the night. He had only emptied the magazine of the general's Patchett once more before all the fire was directed on him. He was stung all over by bullets. He fled, a grazed wound on his head bleeding profusely. Out in the bush he had fled, wildly firing at his pursuers, thinking only one thought over and over: 'We are done, we are finished.'

And he ended up in the hideout standing in front of his leader very guilty of failure.

'We failed,' Kimamo answered the reluctant question simply.

He did not know what to expect from the general. He did not very much care about anything. He was hurting, bleeding.

'You failed,' the general repeated in a trance.

'Yes,' Kimamo mumbled, rubbing the blood from his forehead. His head throbbed and seemed to spin endlessly.

The general stared back at him and sorted out his jumbled thoughts, picking on any one of them at random. His thoughts and his movements were mechanically controlled by the fever. The little microbes ate their way into every tissue, every nerve, and he was apt to say or do anything at any time. Now he waded through the mist-covered valleys of death and his voice seemed to reach out from the grave, his grave.

'Njogu, you failed,' he mouthed, like a silent zombie.

'I am not Njogu,' Kimamo said, throwing the empty Patchett to the ground.

His head now throbbed more painfully. Every beat of his heart resounded like a tin drum in his head. He closed his eyes tight, shook his head repeatedly, to no avail. The general's voice sounded frail and distant, growing gradually louder and reverberating to the point of jarring his whole body. Then slowly the attack subsided a little and he opened his eyes.

A black speck appeared darkly in front of his eyes, flitting like a moth. For a moment he did not comprehend the revolver that wavered a few inches from his face. He stared down the dark, moving barrel enchanted, his mind forming distorted images. Then he focused on the gun, recognized it for what it was and shook his head, searching for an explanation.

'Njogu, you failed,' the general seemed to rumble into his ears.

Then Kimamo understood. His breath choked him and his heart beat wildly. Sweat seeped out of his skin. And now he was sure. He did not want to die. No!

'I am not Njogu,' he choked. 'I am Kimamo. Your lieutenant.'

The other stared icily back at him over the menacing revolver with no sign at all of recognition. His lips tried to form the name Kimamo but quivered to a voiceless stop half-way through.

Kimamo's head throbbed. The images formed in front of his eyes, blurred, weird and frightening. The biting pain washed over his body in a continuous wave. His heart went into a wild gallop that caused warm blood to flow faster from the wound on his forehead. Outside the cave, the night was in turmoil. Many strange booted feet tramped the jungle night. The dark spot in

front of his eyes jerked. Then came the explosion, and darkness. Darkness without measure. The almighty, eternal mystic dark that washed over him and out of him to blend with the dark of the night outside.

In the dark he was alone, cold and lost.

And then suddenly he was not alone.

Through the gloom he saw a tall, powerful phantom glide over to where he sat worn and lost. The ghost placed its hand on his weak shoulder and said comfortingly, voicelessly:

'Let's go.'

'Where?' Kimamo's lips moved but no sound came. 'The gate,' hoarsely.

Kimamo came to his weightless feet, and hand in hand the two floated joyfully towards the golden gates and the cool, dark jungles beyond. And the one who held his hand through the strange land led him into green places with merry, laughing streams and no angry bursting rivers and no pale-faced fierce soldiers, and no guns. The one who led him through the new place, as he had always done, was the general, his general, General Haraka.

From somewhere near the cave in the dark, the hyena laughed, a sarcastic chuckle that rose and fell bubbling on the sea of dark silence, then gradually wafted into time herself, eternity.

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