

Rwanda

A Fascinating Story of Man and Gorilla
in Africa's Mountains of the Moon



by Ned Munger

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A FASCINATING STORY OF
MAN AND GORILLA
IN AFRICA'S
MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON

a novella by

NED MUNGER

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For my father Royal F. Munger

My father wrote in his daily column for the *Chicago Daily News* on Tuesday, January 10, 1933 the following observation:

... During the height of the 1920s evolution controversy, Professor Ernest Hooton was called upon to introduce William Jennings Bryan, who dominated the Scopes trial.

“Man is said to be distinguished from the anthropoid apes principally by his power of articulate speech,” said the Harvard anthropologist with a smile. “If this is true no human being has a greater right to disclaim any relationship with the anthropoids than the speaker of the evening.”

Introduction

Recent repeated instances of genocide, perhaps resulting in the murder of one million people, has focused the attention of the world on a hitherto little-known part of Africa.

The most recent chapter in this blood-drenched saga was the Hutu killing of Tutsi following the invasion by the Tutsi army from Uganda. It is not widely recognized that the government of Uganda is Tutsi-controlled and that President Museveni is, himself, from a Tutsi family that fled an earlier genocide.

The Tutsi army is led by men who took their advanced military training at the United States Army Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. They traveled, to be sure, on official Uganda government passports.

World attention was briefly focused on Rwanda a few years ago with the brutal slaying of Dian Fossey, who pioneered the continuous study of the gorilla. The books on Fossey; the film *Gorillas in the Mist* with Sigourney Weaver; and the activities of the *Digit Fund*, named for one of Fossey's favorite silverbacks, were about all the world had heard of Rwanda until the most recent carnage.

With all the political machinations taking place in Rwanda, there is the danger that the scientific value of studying mountain gorillas (while they still exist!) will be forgotten. My Leakey Foundation colleague, Dr. Richard Wrangham, of Harvard, has said eloquently: "Living apes provide extraordinary testimony to human prehistory. Their psychology speaks to the evolution of the human mind, while their cultures offer clues to the launching of the human career."

Wrangham's words bring me back to the comment, in my dedication, about Williams Jennings Bryan's distance from apes. The theme of this novella is the narrowing of the distance between humans and our close cousins that

has taken place since the 1920s. The importance of chimpanzees in HIV and AIDS research has brought the two species even closer. Thoughts of chimeras are no longer chimerical.

Public criticism of medical experiments using animals and of their imprisonment in zoos, aquariums, and circuses has created new ethical perspectives.

A related theme is how racism is still intertwined with attitudes towards Africa and Africans. Sexism is another strand in the rope that continues to tie people down.

Because of the recent focus on Rwanda in the news, friends have been asking me about my experiences there. This story about a remarkable man in the Mountains of the Moon is my response.

Ned Munger
Pasadena, California
January, 1995

Chapter 1

News that the invading Tutsi army found the cabin of Andries van Straeten has just reached me. In time the tabloid press will learn further details, and I shudder to think of the distortions that will occur. There will no doubt be smears on my own reputation as well, but that is secondary.

For years I've wanted to tell the story, despite my trepidation. The few friends who know the scattered details have kept pressing me. But no one has known the truth—one that may profoundly affect the way we as human beings view ourselves.

The news from Rwanda both releases me from a promise of silence and compels me to tell of a humane, profound, lonely man who lived from 1947 until 1984 in an isolated cabin in the Mountains of the Moon bordering on Rwanda, Uganda, and Zaire. My silence was to protect him against public obloquy and from persecution in the media. But it also precluded the scientific recognition and fame he richly deserves.

When I first left Andries van Straeten it was because I feared he would kill me. Yet I knew that he was one of the extraordinary people of our time. As I turned for a last glimpse of his cabin, the low ground fog that is so common on Ruwenzori curled around my boots. Behind the cabin the mountain rose wild and wet and, in my mood, ominous, for another 8,000 feet. The red earth of the path that led

me away from a profound experience glistened, as I suppose it had in this part of the world for earliest man three, four, five million years ago.

In the middle distance I heard gorillas moving through the brush, and the special sound they make – “hoo, hoo, hoo” – when they are communicating with one another.

So ended the first incredible encounter with a man I first heard about one evening in 1949. Roaming around Africa, as you could in those days, I stopped one evening in the little town of Kisenyi at the north end of Lake Kivu on the Rwanda border with what was then the Eastern Congo. While I was talking with a small group that had gathered on the stoop of the seedy hotel to have sundowners, I fell into conversation with a Flemish planter. It was he who brought up the story of van Straeten.

This man, so my informant insisted, had disappeared two years before to live in an isolated part of the mountain range we could see as a purple line against the sunset, and had been living with gorillas or had certainly been seen interacting with them, according to the Hutu, who had seen him up in the mountains. He was even purported to have fathered offspring—supposedly twins—from a gorilla mother, though no one had ever seen the progeny. I half-smiled and thought of the “Tarzan and the Apes” fantasy. When people appear to act oddly there seems to be a human tendency to make up stories about them. Is it only three hundred years since elderly spinsters living in New England were burned at the stake as witches? Half-human children? No! But a man living socially with gorillas was enough for my imagination.

A Walloon businessman who overheard part of the story scoffed, as I did. Such a thing was not genetically possible, I asserted, though I really had no precise facts to back up my dogmatism. The planter’s details of the supposed union were necessarily fragmented, since they had come to

him third hand through African servants; but I thought it would be interesting to meet this man, van Straeten, if for no other reason than to debunk a tall tale.

After a nightcap of Martel brandy, we all went to bed. I awoke before dawn, and began to conjecture. I've never been attracted to science fiction, and I believe that UFO's are correctly named—unidentified. But my mind went back to lectures I had heard as a freshman at the University of Chicago in 1940. I had thought of becoming a geologist and working in Africa and had early on been fascinated by the remarkable congruence of the bays and peninsulas of the east coast of Latin America and the west coast of Africa. I had looked into some of the geological and botanical evidence that supported the Wegener Hypothesis that the two continents were once united. But when I questioned the highly regarded geologist who taught the class, he said it was impossible, and suggested that I take some physics so that I would realize the inconceivable amount of force that would be required to move whole continents on plates.

And from biology I recalled a famous physiologist, A. J. Carlson, who gave marvelous demonstrations at his lectures, stating categorically that nerves once severed could never be reunited and that a finger cut off could not possibly be rejoined. Time and technical advances had disproved both professors' dogma. Were primate crosses truly impossible?

I opened my mosquito netting, shook out my shoes for scorpions, and dressed quickly. After coffee and a croissant, I began a morning of fruitless search for more details. Several Belgians had heard rumors but could produce no facts. One said that "les noirs" might try such a thing and it wouldn't surprise him.

My first real clue came at lunch when I was quaffing a lager on the stoop of the hotel and overhead a waiter

insulting a Pygmy in Swahili by calling him an ape.

I had already noticed the man because he didn't look like the local Pygmy people of Rwanda, known as the Twa. He looked more like the still-shorter, related group, the Bambuti, from the Ituri forest in the Congo. This Mbuti was characteristically a dark reddish brown, rather than black. Scientists have speculated that some Pygmys lose some of their melanin through centuries of living in the forest.

When the insulting waiter stopped to refill my glass, I asked him about the Mbuti. It developed that he had been ostracized by his family for some reason, had left the Ituri forest, and worked for van Straeten, whom he referred to as the "Bwana with the blinking eyes." This was shortly after World War II when the Belgian had first come to Kisenyi. The waiter knew a smattering of a "Pygmy" language—he said it was Efé—and using him as a rather shaky translator, I began to question the Mbuti man.

Once it was clear that the Pygmy had helped the bwana with the blinking eyes to move into the mountains and had visited him there, I asked in Swahili where the man was to be found. The translator spoke in Pygmy Efé: "Avu Bo Avi?"

There was no reply.

"Karibu na wapi shamba?" (Whereabouts is his place?) I asked in my makeshift Swahili. The Pygmy's reply was "Evu-Baba-Udo," which in Swahili became "Milima mingi" — very mountainous.

"Mbale" Far?

"Isuguu, A," the Mbuti Pygmy said, which was translated to me as "one hundred." I assumed he meant a hundred kilometers, or some sixty miles. But how well did the Pygmy estimate the distance?

We continued our linguistic struggle, made all the more difficult by an obvious reticence on the part of the Pygmy

and the translator. I asked the waiter to bring two cold lagers. A passing Belgian glared at me and at the Pygmy; the Pygmy guzzled the beer but refused to sit down.

“Da I? Di?” (Close by or far away?). The waiter, aided by a twenty-franc tip, put the query.

“Di!”

The conversation continued in this frustrating vein for two hours, with the waiter breaking away at intervals to serve drinks to other customers. While waiting for my translator, I took the Pygmy's hand in mine and turned it palm up. He smiled shyly but indicated no displeasure as I examined the tips of his fingers. It may have been rude of me, but I had learned somewhere that African Pygmies stand at a human extreme in regard to their fingerprints. In this highly inheritable characteristic, these Pygmies have the lowest number of ridges found anywhere in the world because they have the highest number of arches (around 15 percent), by a wide margin, of any human fingerprints. I put my fingertips next to the Mbuti's, moving my chair around to do so, and the difference in ridges was obvious. Whether he understood the gesture is conjectural.

While I was examining the fingerprints, the rotund Cypriot proprietor kept glaring at me, but I ignored him. When the waiter returned, I asked whether van Straeten was a bad man. The Mbuti replied with a phrase that came to me as “a man of God.”

When the lunch-time rush was over, I undertook, by means of laborious questions, to make a map. Pygmies do not have a Western concept of distance. Jean-Pierre Halliet, who has often filmed Pygmies, had described their cosmology to me. My informant might have been trying to give me directions to heaven or to the ends of the earth.

Before I could start to follow my map, sketchy as it was, I came down with a serious bout of malaria. In those days prophylactics against malaria were not as well developed

as they are today, and I was afraid that if my bouts of fever persisted and I was reinfected, I might reach the stage of blackwater fever. So I left Kisenyi and returned to Makerere College in Uganda, the base for my Fulbright Fellowship. During my recuperation I wrote to van Straeten, care of Poste Restante, Kisenyi, and also in care of the nearest branch of the Société Générale, where it was rumored that he cashed disability checks. I asked if I could visit him at his convenience. I received no answer.

The tale stuck in my mind, however, even after I was back in America. At dinner parties I sometimes mentioned the rumor of children half-human and half-ape. The variety of reactions was surprising and often appalling. Many listeners became agitated and angry for inchoate reasons. To some the thought was profane. Almost without exception, they assumed the mother was human. A Stanford alumna volunteered that the offspring—if there were any, and she hoped there weren't—would be terrible. "What would you expect," she asked, "from the kind of woman who would do something like that?"

An executive who insured race horses and is knowledgeable of breeding said that any progeny "would look very much like a Negro." I suggested that a child might be quite hairy, and pointed to the lack of hirsutism among Blacks. But he put his fist down and said, "No, the child would be like an African." Skepticism (which I shared) and disgust (which I didn't) were the common threads.

These conversations took place over a decade or so, and I wish I had made careful notes of what kind of people reacted in which way. During that period I had finished my doctorate in political geography and was employed by an organization supported by a group of American universities. Under this program I studied and reported on African developments for two years, but my field work in Africa didn't take me near Kisenyi during that period. I

spent the next year lecturing at ten universities, from the Harvard Business School in the Northeast to Caltech on the West Coast, and on to Hawaii.

Chapter 2

When independence came to the Belgian Congo in July, 1960, I was in Ghana. On July 7 the riots began and the Congo airports were closed to commercial planes. On July 12 I flew to Brazzaville, the capital of the former French Congo, which lies across the Congo River from Kinshasa (then Léopoldville). A Citroen taxi took me from the airport to the ferry slip. The waterfront of Léopoldville, four miles away across the Stanley Pool, was ablaze. A ferry discharged 230 frightened and angry Belgians and only a few automobiles. Hundreds of cars had been abandoned on the Belgian Congo side of the river by colonials in their frantic haste to escape. One man who had left his Mercedes on the opposite bank ran up to me, dangled the car keys in my face, and offered me the car for \$100 cash. I didn't accept.

Only three of us waited for the return trip: David Reed of the *Reader's Digest*, Winston Burdette of CBS News, and me. While we watched the passengers carry off their hastily assembled belongings, a tall man, whose gray hair enhanced his handsome features, approached me. He turned out to be a Flemish planter from the Kivu (the province in which Kisenyi is located), and he was cursing his fate. Although he maintained his ramrod posture, it was clear that his world was crumbling around him. "I just don't understand these people," he complained in accented En-

glish. "They are savages. I have known them for forty years. I know them well. I have always slept with their women. And now they treat us like this!"

His tirade continued, but in a rare pause I managed to ask him if he knew Andries van Straeten. "That man," he bellowed as the whistle blew and I had to go up the gangplank. I'm not sure if the planter was referring to a van Straeten or "my" van Straeten.

The fighting in the capital eased with the arrival of the red beret Belgian paratroopers. In less than a fortnight came the first United Nations contingents from Tunisia and Ghana, and the situation in Léopoldville began to stabilize. Although I spent a good deal of time watching and talking with Patrice Lumumba (whom I'd first met at the Pan African Congress in Ghana in 1958) and with the young military leader Mobutu (who was sponsored by the Catholic Bishop and the CIA), the best work I did was carefully to record what many Belgian victims of rape had to say and the views of some of those who did the raping. Susan Brownmiller subsequently reprinted some of my observations in her seminal book, *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, which headed the *New York Times* best-seller list.

Just being in the old Congo had turned my thoughts to the story of the gorilla-human children. The idea of following up on this tale had never been entirely dormant, but some pressing event in Mauritius, or in Liberia or in South West Africa had kept coming up. Now I saw a chance to investigate the black-white clashes that had gone on in the eastern Congo, and perhaps to pursue van Straeten.

* * *

After three weeks in the disorganized capital, I was finally able to get a lift on a Force Publique (Congo Army) DC3 to what was then Stanleyville. I felt far greater personal fear and tension in the disorder of Stanleyville than

I had felt in Léopoldville.

Driving through the town center, I noticed that all the Belgian statues had been pulled down. Compared with previous visits, the absence of “Europeans” on the streets was immediately noticeable. Only a few priests and civil servants had remained after the Force Publique broke loose from its moorings to assault and rape whites. Over towards the river, I walked through the open doors of a row of villas. The European occupants had obviously left in a great panic. Half-eaten breakfast food was on one table. A teddy bear had been dropped just inside the front gate of another modest home. Several houses had been torched. Tension hung heavily in the humid air. It seemed a good time to be in the countryside; or so I rationalized as my chance to continue the quest for van Straeten grew.

While I sought a vehicle, I kept hearing the story about the Congolese who had told a young Belgian girl to be sure to wear clean underwear on the day of independence. The story, started in fear by whites, was endlessly repeated. In other countries on the verge of independence I had heard another cliché told to me as genuine fact. Supposedly, a housewife asks her servant, “Joseph, on independence you won’t kill me, I’ve been good to you?” The stereotype answer, still circulating in 1992 in white circles in South Africa was: “No missus, I kill missus next door; that house-boy kill you.”

After one day the desire to get out of Stanleyville was overwhelming. I bought a landrover for \$600—a quarter of the normal price for such a used vehicle—from a scared Belgian who wanted nothing more than to leave the Congo and never come back. I think he was the local brewmaster. He accepted my personal American check with alacrity, no questions asked. As I drove out of Stanleyville en route to the Ruwenzori, I patted the pocket of my bush jacket. I wanted to feel the photostated copy of the original map

the Pygmy had helped me draw. I wondered if I would see him and, if so, whether we would recognize each other. A ballet of brightly colored birds danced over the road ahead. I took them to be a good omen.

About 5:00 p.m., some 200 kilometers to the south where the road turns east and away from the Congo at the little town of Kirundu, I was stopped by a roadblock of empty petrol barrels. Guns were leveled at me by the predecessors of the feared "Simbas" (lions). Every private had been promoted by Lumumba and President Kasavubu, so it was an army without one common soldier. Moreover, many small groups of civilians had entered brigandage and murder on their own.

It was a tense situation, especially when one rather wild-eyed young soldier (he appeared to be under the influence of the local variety of marijuana) pointed to my blond hair and began to shout, "Flamand, Flamand." Flemish-speakers had a deservedly bad reputation among many Africans. I hastily pulled out my passport, shouting, "Non, non, je suis Americain." A corporal jerked it out of my hand and proceeded to study it upside down. The official stamps on the numerous expired visas, which were evident as the extra pages unfolded, seemed to carry some authority.

In a mixture of French and Swahili we made a deal. I would give them a case of beer I had been carrying for bargaining purposes and three jerry cans of petrol. This left me with only five cans, and I could ill afford to lose any because the chances of finding a place to fill my tank were diminishing. The barrier of drums was moved aside and I was allowed to drive on, saying "kwa heri" (good-bye). As I left the all-but-deserted little town, I forced myself not to scrunch down in the open vehicle, despite the fear of a bullet in my back. It turned out that I was the last "European" to pass that way for the next month, though

several were murdered in the attempt. It is terrifying when you realize that your skin color constitutes a judgment on your politics and even on your life. I began to appreciate better than ever how many Congolese must have felt in colonial days.

That adrenalin-flowing experience left me exhausted. Fifty kilometers later I drove into some high grass, ate part of a canned Christmas pudding (the Léopoldville stores didn't offer much selection) and fell asleep in the landrover.

* * *

The rest of the drive to Kisenyi remained tense. Would I hear the crack of a rifle shot from close quarters? Would there be another roadblock around the next curve? But there was some relief on open stretches as the road, reddened from the lateritic soil, ran through the savanna. I was reminded of driving in the same remote area years before with a graduate student from Makerere when we came upon an old man wearing only skins—something you would not see today. At the time I was collecting unusual spears with the idea of using them as curtain rods in some future recreation room if I ever owned a house. The old man was carrying a magnificent spear and I stopped to bargain with him. I offered him ten francs, which was a fair price, but he shook his head, saying “hapana.” I accepted his “no” and was about to drive on when my Muganda student chided me for my lack of salesmanship. So I got out of the car, took thirty francs from my pocket, put them in the gnarled hand of the old man, closed his fist over them, and, imagining my Yankee-of-Madison-Avenue salesman charisma, reached for his spear. He pulled it back, looked at me with what I later decided was condescension for my ignorance, looked at the open savanna where lions, leopards, and cheetahs roamed, and said softly in Swahili, “Yes, for thirty francs, I can buy three new spears in the next village. But if I give you my spear now, will the lions know

that?"

The memory of his superior intelligence in the situation sobered me as I drove on. As Pliny said so many centuries ago: *Ex Africa semper aliquid novi*—there is always something new out of Africa. The old adage would be a good motto for my new adventure.

A moment later the road topped a hill, and I had a clear view of the Ruwenzori Range. The setting sun illuminated the higher peaks in a strange light. Ptolemy's description of the Mountains of the Moon, though it may have been based on myth or misunderstanding, was not inaccurate. There was a whitish, luminescent quality to the landscape. I braked to a stop. Were these the mountains that Herodotus had described? Was the mountain the Arabs described as "silvery" before me? Was it traces of mica that produced the luminous, moonlike quality? Or was it the setting sun reflecting off the snowcapped peaks? Of course I knew better, but I could understand Stanley's inability to believe he saw snow on those peaks on the equator. When his porters told him the whiteness was salt, he believed them. The same mistake was made by the early German explorers who first sighted Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Being a geographer, I had not been particularly proud when I had read the accounts of meetings at the Royal Geographical Society at which those who claimed there were snowcapped peaks on the equator were ridiculed as daft: all geographers knew that the equatorial sun would instantly melt any snow or ice.

The Ruwenzori is a great range more than fifty miles in extent and the half dozen peaks are all part of the range. As I watched the sun set lower, so that it caught only the higher elevations (and I was fortunate that day because even Stanley marched past much closer without ever seeing the peaks hidden by the clouds), I could see that some of the shoulders of the peaks that had great expanses of mica

schist might well sparkle like silver under the direct sun. In this twilight they didn't. They were more orange as the slanting rays of the sun were diffracted by the almost constant dust over the savanna, though perhaps the mica schist background was responsible for what seemed to me to be the shiny gold quality.

My empyrean reverie ended abruptly when my right front wheel dropped into a deep pothole. The vehicle swerved to the right and, in three seconds, I had slid into a runoff trench and stopped so abruptly that my head knocked the straight-up windshield. To my relief I saw no blood when I recovered from the stunning blow and looked in the mirror. But a huge lump started to swell almost immediately and would be with me for more than a week. It was a painful lesson: watch the road and not the sun's rays on the mountains.

Fortunately for me, the ditch did not run parallel to the road. In that part of Africa ditches are dug at an angle at intervals of approximately ten to twenty yards to carry away the torrential rains during the wettest season. My right front shock absorber was broken, but eventually I managed to reverse out and onto the road. With the one wheel hitting hard on the smallest corrugation, I drove on for almost two hours after the early twilight, and was exhausted when I reached the small Kisenyi Inn. It was almost empty, although a number of Belgians who lived in the town were at the bar. I was too tired to begin my search. After a supper of soup and local pork, I tumbled into bed, drew up the comforter one needs at that elevation after the sun has set, and slept until eleven the next day.

Once up and shaved, I looked for the waiter-translator in the restaurant. He might know the Pygmy's whereabouts. I was without success. The few Belgians I could recall had fled. The Cypriot owner of the hotel had died, but his wife was there and ran it, after a fashion, with the help of a

cousin from Nicosia. The only news she could give me was that she had seen van Straeten in town to buy supplies several years before, and she thought that the Pygmy—even Mrs. Theocrites didn't know his name—had picked up supplies for the Belgian recluse from time to time. Over the next two days I consulted the roughly drawn map and asked the locals about areas that would normally be uninhabited. A particular mountainside in Rwanda, across the border from Kisenyi, seemed the most likely place to look for the proverbial needle in a haystack, and after buying up what groceries I could from Mrs. Theocrites, I began my search.

The steep-sided hills of Rwanda are cultivated to the tops in most places because of the dense population. After my visit in 1950, I had published an article on the Rwanda migrants who work for the relatively wealthy Baganda in the cotton fields of southern Uganda. The British anthropologist Audrey Richards looked at my flow charts and was intrigued with those migrants, especially the way the trip to Uganda had become a status symbol among young Rwanda men, who impressed Rwanda girls with talk of the perils of a long walk through lion country.

But not all of Rwanda is heavily populated, and especially not above 8,000 feet in the rugged terrain where my map indicated van Straeten lived. How to find him? The landrover took me—I was driving slowly because of the broken shock absorber—up a rutted road of dark red soil above the 6,000 foot line, and I pitched a tent as a base camp. Some wandering Hutu might “liberate” it, but I couldn't set up camp every night. A nearby mountain stream was almost surely free of bilharzia and other unpleasant organisms, and firewood was easily available.

The first night was chilling, but I somehow got used to the cold. From this spot several points on the Pygmy's map could be identified including an unusually shaped saddle

between two peaks. Whenever I met anyone on the trails—most of the Africans were alone and didn't know about independence—I asked where I could find a white man: “Wapi Mzungu?”

On the fourth day a poacher with what he said was fresh “gorilla meat,” (the expression nauseates me even now as I write it) pointed to a plateau area to the south and said there was a “mzungu” there. I offered him money to show me, but he shook his head (“hapana”) and seemed afraid. It was too late to proceed that afternoon and I bedded down.

Chapter 3

The next morning, after a three hour up-and-down hike in light rain, I came upon a large wooden shamba, or house. Actually, I almost missed it because the entrance to the clearing in which it stood was concealed by tall grass that would spring back as you walked over it. But with the rain the grass had stayed bent over when someone or some animal had made a path earlier that morning.

In the clearing I paused halfway to the shamba to take in the scene. After a moment, I started forward eagerly but froze in my tracks when an imperious voice behind me ordered: "Arrêtez!" It was well I did stop, because when I turned around a man, a white man, was holding a rifle pointed at my chest.

"Monsieur van Straeten?" I asked.

He stared balefully, and then nodded his head, "Oui."

My adrenalin was really pumping. Not in any apprehension, but with the excitement of finding this man who might well have been dead after so many years. I guess I hadn't realized how long I had been thinking of this moment and how much the prospect had come to mean to me.

He stood silently. His long white hair and lined face were like those of a biblical prophet. But the flickering eyelids were fixed on me while he listened to my story about wanting to observe some gorillas and about having been

told years before that he was an authority. He surveyed me suspiciously and asked me to throw him my papers. Holding the gun in the crook of his arm, he looked at my passport, including the added visa pages that again unfolded almost to the grass.

“Vous êtes journaliste?”

“Non, Monsieur van Straeten, je suis un professeur Américain.”

“Bon,” he said, and invited me into his abode.

The moment I crossed the rough-hewn threshold of the cabin, the odor assaulted my nostrils. I gulped. The smell was different from that of a skunk, but not necessarily more pleasant. I felt the presence of a living creature. Was there a half-gorilla child (or children) in the one other room behind the heavy khaki-colored curtain? The answer would be “no.”

Van Straeten seemed as oblivious of the odor that permeated the cabin as I was conscious of it. I was glad his back was toward me as he began to brew a most welcome cup of tea. Midway in the process, he turned suddenly and gave me a wary look. As he finished pouring the tea, he turned again and, switching to English, which he spoke well but with a pronounced English (almost Cornish) accent, he asked, “Sugar and powdered milk?”

We sat down in serviceable chairs and he questioned me closely for more than an hour. He particularly wanted to know if anyone knew where I was. I said that the director of the University Consortium in New York knew I was in Africa and probably in the Congo, but that he often didn't hear from me for a month at a time when I was in the field. This seemed to please van Straeten immensely. It wasn't until later that his knowing that no one knew where I was within a thousand miles caused me great concern and fear.

But that afternoon he gradually relaxed and bade me stay the night. He showed me around the clearing, pointing

out the white blossoms of the edelweiss that his mother had sent from the Alps to this mountain retreat less than a hundred miles south of the equator. The sun had appeared belatedly and I watched a fish hawk circle lazily in the blue sky, a lonely sentinel over what I took to be a lonely man. The next day he said I could stay on for a few days. We walked back to my landrover, packed the tent, and following a route I would never have found on my own, drove back to his shamba.

* * *

Here let me digress from my chronological account and relate some of the facts about Andries van Straeten as I later came to know them.

Van Straeten grew up in the Brussels suburb of Mechelelen. When World War II began, he was in his final year of medical school. He was the most brilliant student in the history of Brussels University and had been offered bursaries in zoology, law, and philosophy before entering medical school. His mentors used the word "genius" in describing him, and from what I came to know of him I could only agree.

After Britain and France declared war on Germany, van Straeten could have stayed on in medical school. Belgium was then neutral, though it began to strengthen its armed forces. But van Straeten signed up for the Air Force and was billeted in a former tourist hotel at Dunkirk when the German attack on Belgium began. Like so many others, when the German Blitzkrieg neared the coast, van Straeten tried to escape in a small sailboat. It capsized in the English Channel, and he was picked up by a fishing boat out of Dover.

In Britain, he was virtually ordered by the government-in-exile to continue his medical studies. But he wanted a more active role because of his intense dislike of Nazism.

Somehow he managed to join the Royal Air Force.

He proved to be an exceptional fighter pilot. In one day over the Channel he was credited with downing two Messerschmidts and shared credit for another. Only a week later, however, off the coast from Hull, he and his wingman were jumped by six Messerschmidts. Van Straeten was shot down in flames. In his maneuvering he had gotten too low to parachute. When he crashed into the channel, it put out the flames and saved his life, according to the men in the motorized lifeboat who pulled him from the water.

Van Straeten's injuries were serious enough to keep him out of the rest of the war, but eventually he made a good recovery—with one exception. During his convalescence, he developed a nervous affliction that caused him to blink several times a second. The memory of the flames was blamed for the problem. The best doctors in Britain and, after the war, in Belgium tried to find some relief for him. As a last resort they cut some nerves near his eyes, which decreased the blinking only a fraction, but caused the flesh on his cheekbones to sag. He received full disability for his affliction and tried to live a normal life after the war. But it was impossible. People could not help staring at the constant movement of his eyelids. They never remained open or closed for any length of time; even when he slept, they fluttered like the wings of a hummingbird.

Even before he was shot down, van Straeten suffered from a condition known as congenital blepharism, in which spasms force the eyelids to close frequently, but the condition was not sufficiently serious to require an operation. (The same has been said of Rosalynn Carter, before she elected to have a surgeon perform a blepharoplasty. The operation on the ex-President's wife removed wrinkles and a bagginess around the eye which resulted in a more youthful appearance.) In any case, part of my rapport with van Straeten was my ability to ignore the physical fluttering

and to refrain from asking questions about his affliction.

Van Straeten did not finish his formal medical degree, but he read extensively in medicine, chemistry, zoology, and philosophy. More and more he became a recluse and finally, in his despair of possibly being nothing more than a sort of freak, he decided to go to the Congo, where in some isolated but healthy mountain area he could at least find tranquility with nature.

* * *

Van Straeten was well adjusted when I met him. He had an amazing number of amenities that one would not expect to find in such a place.

The cabin was made from *Imvule* wood. It looked like my great-great-grandfather's home, which still stands as the first dwelling in Wichita, Kansas. Van Straeten had at least a thousand books in a dozen different languages in a bookcase that covered the entire wall of the larger of the two rooms. Another had a bookcase, for rare books, that had an electric light in it to dehumidify the air in the rainy season. The light was powered by a kerosene generator that van Straeten used only at night.

There were some watercolors (unsigned, but the work of van Straeten himself, I learned later), an oil painting, and a wind-up gramophone. A metal five gallon debi can that had once held kerosene now held water; it stood in the corner by the sink and was covered with cheesecloth. He had gotten rid of the fumes by burning grass in the debi can. One way for me to be useful was to fill the can twice a day from the nearby mountain stream. Van Straeten slept in the main room. He assigned me to a cot in the smaller back room. It was cold away from the fireplace, but a pile of animal skins kept me warm during the frigid nights at that elevation, though their weight often made me sleep badly.

I fell asleep early that first night, and still he was up

before me. Actually, what woke me was the sound of a log being split. After dressing hastily, I went out behind his cabin where, about twenty yards away, he was obviously building a similar structure. I watched him for maybe five minutes as he used his ax to shape the end of a log. He stopped, look quizzically at me, and without even a "good morning," handed me the ax and pointed at the other end of the log.

As that end began slowly to be shaped under my less expert swings of the ax, I not only began to sweat but also to breathe heavily because of the elevation. Van Straeten seemed to find me useful, at least in his building project, and so we worked together that day and the next.

Van Straeten got over his suspicion of me by the third day. Although he wasn't very communicative at first, he seemed to want me to stay for companionship. I say for companionship because at first that appeared to be his primary motivation. I wish it had remained so. It was also true that by day, when it wasn't raining too hard, I helped him dig the foundation for the adjoining cabin. When you spend a day cutting down a sizeable tree, hacking it into logs of the right length, and splitting smaller trees to make boards, you appreciate how much physical labor must have gone into the clearing of the Northwest Territory of America.

But I don't really think it was only my labor than van Straeten was most willing to accept in return for his hospitality. He was lonely and laconic at first, but I wondered from the start if he didn't have a deeper motive. He said he would take me among to the gorillas later, but he seemed to forget that promise. We made progress on the cabin. We even worked one rainy day. Several times we sat on the stoop watching the lightning, and I tried to edge around to the subject about which I had heard such a startling rumor ten years before. Each time he would ignore me and

stare into the forest as though the answer were revealed in the dripping leaves.

I soon became aware of the large number of animals, or creatures, as van Straeten preferred to call them, around the shamba. They appeared to be tamer than most animals are in an African forest. Van Straeten finally confessed that he had nursed back to health quite a number of them that had been ill or injured. In the process they had, of course, become rather friendly. Before my stay van Straeten had come upon a little buck—a *dik-dik*—that had a broken leg. Ordinarily the animal would have been dead in hours, but somehow it had managed to hobble into the clearing. Van Straeten made a splint for the leg and fed the buck with a bottle until one day it bounded away, fully recovered. He told me also, with some pride, that he had managed to cure the infected foot of a gorilla. On several occasions while I was there I saw this gorilla peering at us from a safe distance through the trees, but it would not approach. Van Straeten identified it as a male of nine years or so, and said the gorilla would approach him when he was there alone, but obviously not when I was present. I was amazed by his story of a gorilla that had allowed itself to be treated, and since this bore on the rumor I was so curious about, I encouraged van Straeten to tell me more.

Very little was known about gorillas at that time. Garner's book¹ of over fifty years ago had little scientific value, though Garner had had his "bearers" leave him in an iron cage in gorilla country for long periods so that he could observe these animals.

A friend of mine, the late Hal Coolidge, when a young man on the 1933 Harvard Africa Expedition, had compiled a list of the gorilla species that were supposed to exist, and had reduced the alleged thirty-plus to only two. Hal had also established fairly well that the ranges of these

¹R. L. Garner, *Gorillas and Chimpanzees*, London: Osgood, McIlvaine and Co., 1896.

two species did not overlap, and in fact were separated by a distance of almost a thousand miles. The date of separation from the common ancestor was not then known and is still not known today.

George Schaller's gorilla research,² based on work in the same part of Africa, had not yet begun when I was van Straeten's guest. And of course the unprecedented and continuing studies by Dian Fossey were not even envisioned yet. Her research, supported by the Leakey Foundation and National Geographic Society, was shown in part in a network television special in 1975.

Van Straeten was an unheralded and unpublished student before the Schaller and Fossey research. But to his credit, the Belgian had assembled an extraordinary library of what was then known about gorillas.

The days in the cabin seemed to follow one another like the formless white clouds that drifted past the towering Ruwenzori peaks. We didn't talk much during the day, though several times van Straeten would beckon me to follow him as he observed the daytime movements of a gorilla troop that roamed nearby, and was dominated by a huge, battle-scarred, silverbacked "alpha male" or "number one."

However, in the evening he gradually began to open up, and after I'd been there for more than a week he told me that most of his immediate family had been lost in the war. This was unusual for families in the Brussels area because there had been so little resistance. His brother had been killed in the underground in 1943 or 1944 when the Germans "turned" a secret radio net and lured many would-be agents, including Jan van Straeten, from Britain to supposedly secret landing fields in Holland.

* * *

A rainy Friday. Andries' routine was to work on the

²George Schaller, *The Year of the Gorilla*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

building Monday through Friday. On the weekend he would write up notes from his gorilla observations and do a lot of reading from his library. He also listened more to the radio. But it was so rainy on this Friday that we both read and then drifted into general conversation.

He told me that, in 1948, after he had been in the Congo for not quite a year, he received word that his mother was dying of leukemia. He made the long journey back to his home in the Brussels suburb of Mechelen, and by the time he reached her he found that she had rallied. However, the doctors told him the improvement could only be temporary, and he decided to stay until the end. He had not kept in touch with any of his former friends, and because of his affliction he did not dare to renew the acquaintances. He had had a girlfriend before the war. He confided somewhat wistfully that they had managed to spend several of his leaves together before Dunkirk. But after the war, with the tremendous self-consciousness that his incessantly flickering eyelids had caused, he decided that no one could really love him, and that if she would consent to marry him it could only be out of pity. He would later tell of a vacation together, but he did not say whether he had given her a chance to make up her own mind in the matter. He implied that since his injury all of his relationships with women had been fleeting at best because he would not risk the chance of rejection.

To help fill the long hours while waiting for his mother to die, van Straeten spent considerable time in the Brussels Zoo. He wandered about alone, shunning people, and felt more at home with animals that reminded him of his new home in the Ruwenzori. At that time the Brussels Zoo contained several tiglons, the offspring of the African lion and the Indian tiger. Van Straeten was intrigued that two species of the cat family, especially species confined in their natural state to separate continents, could mate and actu-

ally reproduce. He read in the Zoo's library about a litter of two ligers in the Bloomfontein Zoo in South Africa, and about the zeedonk, whose appearance was that of a donkey but whose forelegs were striped like a zebra. All of these exotic offspring were sterile, just as the mule is considered by most people to be sterile.

Apparently, it was then that van Straeten's early experiences with gorillas in the Ruwenzori, combined with his thoughts about the Brussels tiglons, led him to wonder about mating different primates, especially the great apes and man. Much later he explained to me that his passion to pursue his extraordinary experiment was partially incited by the family priest, who had tutored him as a child. One day after they were both at his mother's bedside in Mechelen, van Straeten accepted the priest's invitation to have lunch. Van Straeten steered the conversation to the question of man-ape differences. The priest incensed van Straeten by invoking the bible and "God's Revelations" to "prove" the differences between men and apes. Father Maarten pointed to the legal and religious ban on intercourse between man and animal and the heavy penalties for bestiality. Van Straeten felt the priest was both condescending and dogmatic. It sparked a comment from van Straeten about "Scopes trial mentality" and his disappointment that Father Maarten sounded so much like a fundamentalist American Protestant. They parted angrily after gulping their strong coffee.

The luncheon acrimony further stimulated van Straeten to press his inquiries based on his own prewar study of biochemistry. He was so intrigued that he broke through his shyness and reclusiveness and went to talk with several geneticists, anatomists, and immunologists at the Free University of Brussels and at Louvain, especially those who had been his classmates.

He was referred to the pioneering work of Nuttall,³ who had written on blood relationships. The striking similarities in the blood proteins of the ape and of man, known at the turn of the century, intrigued van Straeten. The professors told him of the explosion in knowledge in molecular biology after World War II, and of the use of proteins and nucleic acids in providing a quantitative measurement of the distances between one species and another. However, at the time van Straeten was in Brussels, this kind of research was just beginning. Not until 1963 was it determined that the amino acid sequence in the blood proteins of the great apes and in man are virtually identical. Still later it was discovered that the amino acid sequences of two key polypeptides averaged 99 percent identical.

What van Straeten had taken issue with—and recent discoveries of a biochemical nature suggest he was right—was the setting of humans at a great distance from their primate relatives. Van Straeten took this to be a conscious or subconscious assertion by man of his defensive distance from other animals. I believe the reason he was so acutely sensitive in this respect lay in the way people appeared to treat him because of his affliction—that is, in a sense, as less than human.

The question of who is related intrigued me, but my knowledge of biology is limited. I took the bull by the horns:

“Look, something is missing in my American education. What do you call a species?”

He thought a minute and then seemed to be translating in his mind from French: “A natural population of wild animals in a particular setting interbreed to form a deme. In most cases they can be interbred with other demes on both sides of them—for example, in the adjacent valleys—although fertility may be lessened.” I nodded my under-

³G. M. M. Nuttall, *Blood Chemistry and Blood Relationships*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1904.

standing. He continued: "In a long series of interlocking demes all adjacent demes can interbreed but those on the ends are completely infertile. By definition a species can interbreed. But this is not always true of individuals at the two poles.

"I do not accept the assumptions of sterility in the Brussels tiglons. The number is small. The sexual mating is limited. There could very well be a very low fertility ratio while still allowing a tiglontiglon live birth perhaps once in twenty or a hundred conceptions."

I felt a surge of adrenalin and deliberately looked away from him to conceal my suddenly heightened interest. Was he saying that while gorilla-human fertility may be very low, it is not nonexistent? To hide my excitement, I got up and began cleaning the dinner dishes. Van Straeten buried himself in a book while I finished the tidying up and said good night.

Chapter 4

I had been at van Straeten's cabin just short of a month when, after a Saturday night dinner of canned ham, Andries broached the subject of my curiosity quite explicitly. In doing so he encouraged me to call him by his first name and began to call me "Ned." With his Flemish accent it sound like "Nedt."

"You know, Nedt, somewhere, somehow in the last millions of years there must have been sexual relations among all the different primates, or most of them who occupied more or less the same territory." His eyes began to flicker more rapidly than usual as he went on: "Just you take early man and gorillas, Nedt. The odds must be that one member of each species, of opposite sexes, must have been isolated together by some natural disaster—a flood, a fire, or an epidemic. How easy it must have been for a gorilla and a human to be left stranded on a new island created by the meander of the Congo we both know."

I conceded the theoretical possibility and also its likelihood, given thousands, even millions of storms, in this part of the African continent. Not thinking—my mind was racing as fast as Andries' eyes twitched—I said, "But then where would the offspring be if man and gorilla could mate?" I knew the answer before his half-critical, half-condescending smile broadened, but he spoke: "I didn't say it would happen very often. And one would expect

that the result of any such cross would be as infertile as mules. You know, Nedt, it could have happened a thousand years ago right in the Ruwenzori, and there would be no historical record."

"But suppose," Andries went on, "there was some relatively minor factor that prevented conception from taking place. There could be a minor mutation that could make it possible, after a long period during which it was impossible."

"Andries," I began, not wanting to sound too critical or doubting, "why now and why here would a mutation occur?"

"My dear Nedt, as you must know, a principal cause of mutations is cosmic rays. Gorillas may not have always lived at this altitude. In fact, I believe they have been forced to this small area by the competition of man. Cosmic rays are far more powerful at this altitude and far more likely to cause mutations."

He paused and sort of ruminated before carrying on. "And if gorillas did live, as I'm sure they must have done in the recent past, in the Katanga, then some would have been affected genetically by the huge uranium deposits. In humans we know that the mutant alleles can achieve high frequencies in the presence of the gamma rays emitted from such sources of natural uranium. Selection, as in the case of the hemoglobin S in malarial areas, allowed the mutant to spread."

* * *

Something indefinable made me sense that the rumor I was pursuing was true.

It was on a day during the fifth week after I met van Straeten that I felt almost sure. What he said that day convinced me to be patient and stay. And that day I actually saw him leave the shamba with food, come back half an hour later without any, and then eat a hearty dinner.

Maybe he had decided at last to let me see what I came to realize was a twice-daily routine.

When Andries went down the path with the food before an early dinner, I salvaged some paper he had thrown away and on the back of it began making notes of my own. The excitement of knowing almost for sure that there were half-human, half-gorilla children nearby intensified my emotions. Yet I no longer noticed the "gorilla" smell that permeated my own room and most of the cabin.

"NEDT!" His voice had the crack of a whip.

I turned from the table, dropping my pencil. Framed by the doorway with his hands on his hips, he seemed taller than his five feet eight.

A shiver ran through me. In the tense silence of the windowless cabin, I heard the low hiss of the kerosene lamp that cast a yellowish glow.

"I . . . I . . ." It isn't like me to stutter. "I thought I'd make some notes on the flora. You know it so well." I didn't sound convincing even to myself.

"Merde!" he exploded. He reached outside and picked up an ax, which he propped against the wall.

I thought he had said "murder." Fear choked me.

"Merde," he repeated, and I realized he was saying "shit." His eyes were blinking more rapidly than usual as he considered my lame excuse.

Finally, he moved away from the door leaving the axe there.

"Ça va," he said, and proceeded to hang up his jacket. I pushed the notes aside, covering them over when his back was turned. As he sat down across from me, he changed the subject as though there had been no awkwardness.

"You probably know that a cat can deliver a litter of kittens with the sperm of two tomcats?"

I was relieved at his conversational tone. My mind raced to find a way to stay on the new topic.

“Yes, I’ve heard that. And it is supposed to be absolutely impossible with humans. But when I was a cub reporter on the *Chicago Daily News* there was a case where the landlady of a boarding house gave birth to twins and two boarders claimed to be the sires.”

“Merde,” he said in such a different tone that it was like another word. He looked at me sharply.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes,” I replied, glad to be able to hold my own. “The doctor who testified explained that the landlady had a bicornuate womb.”

“What’s that word?”

“Bicornuate. I’m not sure I can spell it, but I think it is b-i-c-o-r-n-u-a-t-e.”

“It sounds French to me, but I never heard the word.”

“Neither had I.” Andries formed a word on his lips. “The ‘cornu’ sounds Latin.”

Could this be something to do with the gorillas? Don’t tell me, I thought, that one twin is all gorilla and one is half-human.

“Nedt,” his voice sounded suspicious, “what are you saying?” I realized that my lips had been moving subconsciously, but I didn’t dare repeat aloud what I had been saying to myself.

Van Straeten was lighting a pipe full of rather vile tobacco that must have come from floor sweepings at the Rhodesian tobacco auctions. He turned and looked at me as if to say “go on.”

“Well, I heard a lot of salacious talk from other reporters outside the courtroom, but the truth is that blood tests indicated that each man had, in fact, sired one of the twins.”

Van Straeten puffed and let out a cloud of the foul blue smoke. He puffed again. His face was so composed I scarcely noticed the flickering eyelids. I could sense a characteristic change of subject.

“Do you know, Nedt, that human intercourse from the rear results in a significantly higher proportion of male-births than the missionary position?”

Was he leading up to something? Before I could decide or carry on the conversation, he bade me good night and went outside to relieve himself. Why had he brought that up and then just left the thought dangling, I wondered as I crawled under my skins. Was it because he wants to increase the odds of having a male grandchild? I speculated for an hour before drifting off.

The next day dawned after a soggy night. Andries took me for a long walk over a trail he knew in his sleep. He made no reference to the previous night but instead discussed European philosophers. I wasn't being flattering when I told him, “Andries, I've only known you a short time. But I must say I admire the breadth of your knowledge.”

He turned on the trail to look back at me; “My dear Nedt,” he began, “after my crash it was science that made my life possible. Now it is humanities that give it meaning.”

At that moment we heard sounds of gorillas moving about. He led me to the edge of a clearing, motioning me to stand directly behind.

The scene for the next two hours was extraordinary. A young male would approach a female. She would turn and present herself. At the moment of copulation or after just a few strokes, the giant silverback adult would approach angrily and drive the young male away.

This was repeated again and again with a series of females and eager young males. But there was only the one silverback. The females didn't appear to be overly concerned one way or another. When approached, they would continue to present themselves—actually it made me think of a curtsy before a dance. I could sense neither annoy-

ance nor relief at the persistent interruption.

The troop finally moved off. As we returned to the trail Andries explained that this game of *coitus interruptus* often continued for so long that the young adult gorillas would become so agitated you would think they were on the edge of a breakdown.

Andries put on his scientist tone: "Third-party interference with copulation often occurs among primates. If you want to look into this, there is an article by Sorenson in the bookcase all about the long-footed tree shrew. . . ."

I didn't hear the end of this sentence, and furthermore didn't really know what a shrew was, let alone a "long-footed" one. I suspected that Andries had a great, though not inordinate, interest in sex. He was always clinical, never salacious.

Why had we stayed at the scene so long? Did he think it would excite me? Did he want me to see just how the rear entry was effected? I felt he had some purpose and that I was part of that purpose.

* * *

It seems strange to me that I let the days slip by without trying harder for a definitive answer. Andries was, I sensed, still testing me. At night we would listen to the news on his battery-operated radio. He was obviously shaken by the rapid political changes and the seething nationalism in the Congo. I explained that my sympathies lay with the African majority, while at the same time I deplored the individual excesses.

He seemed to agree with me, but one night in particular I remember his sarcastic reaction to a report on the Belgian shortwave about violence in Katanga: "Yes, let them have independence, but why so fast?"

Here was a subject on which perhaps I had greater insight. "Andries," I began, "one must acknowledge that Belgium was far too slow in moving toward independence,

even if, in the end, events went too fast for a smooth transfer of power. I so well remember when I was in Léopoldville in 1952 I heard Governor-General Ryckmanns warn the rubber-stamp white legislature that they had best prepare themselves for change. He warned them that in as few as *eighty years* Africans might be ruling the Congo.”

I told Andries how shocked the Belgians were at the prospect of what they viewed as rapid change. Over drinks afterward at the hotel, they had been highly critical of the Governor-General. “But you must have read about that?”

Andries ran his hand thoughtfully through his graying hair. “Oui, I guess we didn’t anticipate change very well. But in Belgium we were always told that we treated the ‘natives’ very well, that they just weren’t educated. Now I know that a lot of racism was wrapped up in Belgian policy. Did you think so at the time?”

“Yes, Andries, because I had seen it in many places in Africa. But the answer to the old myth that it wasn’t color but lack of education that the Belgians objected to was revealed to me in 1952 when Eslanda Robeson, the wife of the famous American singer, stopped at the same hotel in Léopoldville where I was staying. The police no doubt knew about her husband’s politics and the allegations that he was a Communist, but what I saw was sheer racism in the way the hotel staff and the Belgian guests treated an obviously well-groomed and educated black woman.”

Andries was watching me intently, nodding me to go on.

“Mrs. Robeson was seated all alone in a corner of the dining room for three successive meals. None of the tables near her was used and when she had after-dinner coffee outside in the garden, she was again steered to one corner. Finally, and I’m sorry now that it was not until the noon meal, just before she caught a plane out, I went over to this intelligent-looking black woman, introduced myself, and asked if she were an American.”

I again caught myself for the third time that day wondering what was behind Andries' thinking. Why his interest in my continuing to relate the incident with Mrs. Robeson? Then his reason came out rather bluntly:

"So, you get along well with your black countrymen?"

"Yes, I suppose that's true. I've always had black friends, even before I began living so much in Africa."

"And you are not repulsed by a woman if she has a black skin?"

That's it, I thought. Gorillas are very black, although not the human blue-black you often find on the West African coast. I wondered for the first time just what shading of black or brown Andries' daughter would have if I ever saw her.

Andries turned to look directly at me, his flickering eyes noting the delay in my response.

I passed it off with a chuckle, "I guess some skin shades are more attractive than others, but they can't be simply divided black, white, or yellow."

He seemed pleased. But then he shifted from a racial to a political question:

"How did you know she was Eslanda Robeson?" Andries asked with a latent touch of suspicion.

I tried not to let him see me smile at his edged tone: "I didn't know, that is until she told me who she was and invited me to join her for coffee."

Andries was still testing in a way. And I guess I was trying to show both that I could be trusted and that I could add something to our conversations.

It is hard to convey my intense frustration and impatience in being convinced that half-human children were down the forbidden path and yet I was unable to see them. It was all I could do not to explode and say, "Andries, stop playing games with me. Why can't I see your children? Are you afraid of what I would do? Aren't you proud of

them? Wouldn't it be good if they saw another human being besides yourself? What are you, some kind of God-like dictator?"

And yet I knew that if I were so impatient and demanding, I would never see any offspring. I genuinely feared that my life would be at stake if I were to cross Andries. For example, I felt that if I got up early when he was sleeping, and started down the forbidden path, he might waken and make sure that I never reached the end of that or any other path. He was a gentle man—but not a man to be crossed.

I decided to leave without telling Andries. I hated to leave with so much to learn. But it was not my fears of Andries, real as they were, which led me to leave one morning when Andries had left early with food parcels.

The afternoon before I had been in the cabin when Andries called me with that high-pitched urgency that sometimes infects French-speakers.

At the edge of the clearing were two huge mamba snakes. They are the longest venomous snakes in Rwanda. It is easy to exaggerate. But they were at least 13 or 14 feet long. Van Straeten said, "formidable. . . cinq mètres." Then I saw a smaller one partially obscured by the grass. Andries said the longest ones were two males fighting over a female. I kept drawing back towards the cabin door. But the snakes were oblivious of us. One male repeatedly pinned the head of the other mamba to the ground. Eventually the pinned male seemed defeated and slithered into the taller grass. The remaining mambas, male and female, remained at the edge of the clearing on the ground copulating.

I realize some people love snakes. Not me. It gave me chills and nightmares after I left. I don't think I would have ever left the compound in the direction where the mambas had been although logically I might have encountered them anywhere at anytime.

Thinking back there was something unnerving about Andries reaction. Was he brave or foolhardy when he had moved within a few yards of the wrestling male mambas? Perhaps fatalistic was more accurate. But the man had been so close to death that, for him, it seemed to have lost its sting.

Perhaps the mamba fight was an omen that there would be only one winner if I crossed Andries. All this kept re-circulating in me, like sludge in a car radiator, as I made my way off the mountain.

My visit had been all too short. A small chip in a large mosaic. Was I suffering an illusion of knowledge. I expected that my return would be within a year so so. But the world kept turning me in new directions. I left the University of Chicago for good and moved to Pasadena. In 1975, when I was president of the Leakey Foundation, Professor David Hamburg, a member of the Leakey Science and Grants Committee, came to Caltech as a Fairchild Fellow. Although a psychiatrist by training, David had a great interest in the higher primates and had organized a primate center at Stanford University. I had many discussions with him about gorillas and chimpanzees but I never mentioned van Straeten.

The reason was a well deserved modesty. Although Africa was my field, I have never had any credentials in the fields of primatology, anthropology, genetics, or even geology. As a fundraiser one had some fortunate successes. But, when reporters or members of the general public asked the president of the Leakey Foundation for a scientific answer and were turned aside, they sometimes mistook my for ignorance for modesty. Dave Hamburg is a kind man but not necessarily interested in fantastic stories.

Chapter 5

Although I visited Africa twice a year since my first stay at the cabin in the Ruwenzori, I had not been able to arrange time for a return visit to van Straeten. He had not answered my letters—if he ever picked them up at the Poste Restante in Kisenyi. I knew he was getting on in years—he must be approaching sixty—and at considerable personal expense, I arranged another visit to Rwanda. I did not know if he was there, but at least I would find the cabin.

But there he was, grayer and thinner, when I came up the path. I too had changed. My breath came with heavier panting at the altitude than sixteen years before. This time I would not fail to prove one way or another that there was—or had been, at least one offspring. A boy or girl would be about twenty-five now. Silverbacks are in their prime at that age. But a half-human boy or girl? I had to find out.

My impatience at his not answering my burning question was barely concealed the next day as Andries and I worked together extending his clearing. Hard physical work is an antidote to obsession, and I knew I had an obsession about Andries' secret.

Patience is not one of my virtues. I think Andries sensed this. It may be why, after playing chess several evenings, he introduced me to his favorite game, trictrac. In Britain and America it is known as backgammon. In a different version,

often played in the American Navy, it is acey-deucey.

The name trictrac is marvelous onomatopoeia. The Europeans traditionally play the game on a wooden board with wooden counters. (Even Americans such as I, who didn't know the game, are familiar with the red and black triangles on the backs of most checkerboards.) When good players move rapidly in response to the dice, they make a sound like tric, trac, tric, trac.

The basic rules of trictrac can be grasped in three minutes, and many beginners feel they have mastered the game in a few efforts. To the advanced player, however, it has almost infinite subtlety. Everyone knows that chess to begin with is difficult. A high level of skill in checkers can be fairly quickly reached by the astute. Backgammon is something else again.

Now I realize that Andries taught me trictrac as a means of evaluating me psychologically. A book on backgammon is titled "The Cruellest Game." It is that. One evening after I had learned enough to make playing enjoyable for him, Andries remarked, "You know, Nedt, trictrac is much more like life than chess is. Or at least more like my life. In chess, you are almost positive that if you are ahead by a rook and a queen you will win. In fact, it would be an insult to a strong player not to resign once he was clearly a major piece ahead.

"But as you have already learned in trictrac, Nedt, you can be in an exceptionally strong position and then, with a combination of bad rolls of the dice by yourself and extremely good ones by your opponent, you can go from almost sure victory to defeat.

"This happens so often in life. There was my first success as a fighter pilot and then, in a matter of minutes, I met disaster, and was fortunate even to live. How a person reacts to unexpected bad luck, even in trictrac, can tell you a lot about him. Some people cheat, some become

abusive, and some spend so much energy bemoaning their fate that they stumble into far greater disasters. One time I was playing at the RAF hospital and a titled patient (one of the few British aristocracy still to have money) spent the whole lunch hour resenting his bad fortune in losing a hundred pounds that morning, and then played in the afternoon without concentration and lost over two thousand more."

"How much luck is there in trictrac?" I asked.

"About as much as there is in life," he replied. "In any individual game of trictrac or in any event in life there can be luck. I'm not a golfer, but if I were to putt from forty feet against a famous golfer, it would happen from time to time that I might sink my putt and he would miss his. Those who bemoan their luck, whether in trictrac or in life, fail to appreciate how many 'return shots' there are and how rarely one is consistently unlucky. The essential element is skill. I could play a golf pro a hundred rounds of golf and I would not win. The same in trictrac. If a mediocre player like yourself were to play a real expert in a long match, you would certainly win some games with the help of the dice, but you would stand no chance over the long run if your opponent was clearly superior in playing skill.

"The well-prepared person gives himself six or seven even-money chances to win a game or to win in life, and this makes it extraordinarily difficult to defeat him with any consistency. But because the roll of the dice swings so dramatically and so cruelly, the mediocre player always has a ready alibi and can spend his energies cursing his fate.

"The game is a very old one, you know. Homer mentions it in *The Odyssey*. Many soldiers and politicians have been attracted to it, from Richard the Lion Hearted to Benjamin Franklin. Nero was a heavy loser at the game, but

he was surpassed by the Emperor Commodus, who once lost so heavily that he borrowed the money set aside for an expedition to Africa and lost that as well. Perhaps, Nedt, that expedition would have changed the history of this continent!"

For Andries, and for most backgammon players today, the psychological pressures that were strong from the time of the early Greeks multiplied fifty years ago when the "doubling cube" was introduced. When a person who thinks he is ahead can double the stakes, the person behind should often concede (if his chances are less than one in three to win). Whatever the original stake, the temptation is great to accept the double in the hope of good rolls and of the chance to double once again.

"Andries, you are so right. One can feel false optimism when one is behind, but can feel just as strong by the attack on one's ego. To admit defeat is galling, and so one plunges on. My grandfather taught me the wrong philosophy of life; he everlastingly stressed to me as a child that one must 'stick to it.' True, a half-hearted effort is halfway to defeat in life. But even with a maximum effort, some defeats are inevitable. The successful person in backgammon or in life is not the person who endlessly bloodies his head against a thick stone wall, but the one who knows when to climb over it or walk around it."

My attitude towards unexpected defeats in backgammon did seem to give Andries a growing confidence in me. It may seem ridiculous to compare the way he handled his affliction with the way I handled losses in backgammon. But the emphasis was his, not mine. If Andries saw tric-trac as a metaphor for life, I wanted to play my best, not necessarily to win.

* * *

By the time I woke up the hot equatorial sun had dissipated the ground fog and I found myself perspiring. I

heard voices. At first, I thought it was the battery radio, but then I sat bolt upright when I realized it was Andries speaking in Swahili.

The other voice was low and less distinct. Was father talking to offspring? My heart pounded and I wondered whether Andries expected me to enter the central part of the cabin. Surely he knew I would be awake.

Pulling on my faded blue jeans, I went to the doorway, covered only by a burlap curtain made of old Ugandan coffee sacks. Pulling it slowly aside, I peeked into the main room. The voices were low and intense and I couldn't make out just what they were saying. The visitor seemed to be named "Kala," because Andries said the word several times, and it is not Swahili.

Suddenly, the other voice said, "Ndio! Kesho!" and an African figure loomed up. My heart dropped. He turned and moved gracefully toward the door, opened it, and disappeared without seeing me.

Andries was frowning as I pushed aside the burlap and came into the room. My expression pleaded for information. He explained that the man was one of the leaders of a Marxist band, numbering about 300 persons, that was opposed to the government in Léopoldville/Kinshasha. They had watched us for several days.

"But what did they want and why were they here?" I asked.

Andries shook his head from side to side. The sag of his cheeks where the nerves had been cut had never been more apparent. Indeed his whole body sagged. I had never seen him so obviously depressed.

"They want me to go to Dar-es-Salaam for them. One of their messengers has been arrested by the Tanzanian police. And they are desperate for a small truckload of arms stored in a Dar gódown."

"Where do they get arms and for what purpose?" I

asked.

"The arms come from a Marxist group that wants to establish a large base area on the Congo side of Lake Tanganyika. They plan to declare a republic, and eventually, with Chinese aid, they want to use the base to overthrow the western 'puppet government' in Leo."

The tranquility of the shamba was never more evident to me than now when it had been so rudely shattered. "What will you do?"

"They have promised not to establish a lookout base here, and possibly to help protect us from anyone else." He paused and lit one of his Rhodesian cigarettes. "I see no alternative but to help them."

"You could go to the authorities," I said.

He whirled and said with a sarcasm I had never heard him use before, "Yes, and have the Force Publique all over this place. How could I do that?"

"When do you have to go?" I asked.

"Not for a fortnight. They want to send a man from their base camp to the south with me. Apparently he is to go to Peking for special radio training and to bring back shortwave sets and batteries."

Andries brooded that day, and then rather abruptly after dinner he went over to a seat bench built along the west wall, took off the cushions, opened the wooden lid, and took out a Kalashnikov carbine. Now I understood what "Kala" meant. The 7.62 mm AK-47 or Avtomat Kalashnikov, firing the Soviet M 43 round, is one of the best carbines in the world. It can fire 440 yards, holds a clip of thirty rounds and, so important in rugged African conditions, doesn't easily malfunction when it is left in the rain or covered in mud. When I was with Savimbi's Unita forces in southern Angola, they showed me one they had captured from a Cuban patrol.

"They gave me that for protection when they were here

last year." He seemed relieved to have brought me more into the picture.

"But do you really mean that they are serious about establishing a new Marxist country?"

"Absolutely," he replied. "They are determined and resourceful, and with the trickle of Chinese aid they get now, and much more that they will get through Tanzania in the future, I think they will succeed. But they are ruthless and I'm not going to challenge them."

How right Andries was. As we finished breakfast the following morning, the BBC broadcast the news that three American students from Stanford and a Dutch administrator had been kidnapped from Jane Goodall's Gombe Stream Chimpanzee Research Station on the shores of Lake Tanganyika and taken by boat to Zaire.

As I listened to the news, I was careful not to look at Andries. My eyes would automatically focus on his eyelids, and if he were stressed they would be beating faster than usual. All the time I wondered if Andries had played a role or was to play a role in the outrage.

My impatience about the children made me bolder if not somewhat aggressive.

"Do you know the kidnappers' demands," I asked, as though the mysterious visitor was connected to them.

"Yes," he said looking right at me. "They have five demands. First, they want arms, which the American negotiator, Professor David Hamburg of Stanford University, has categorically refused. Second, they want publicity, and this they are getting. Third, they want money, which they are promised. Fourth, they want two of their people released from jail in Tanzania. And fifth, they want the Tanzania government to reopen their supply route to China."

I learned much later that there had been a serious split between Hamburg and Goodall. Most of the kidnapped researchers were graduate students at Stanford. Hamburg,

naturally, felt a great responsibility. He interrupted his stay at Caltech to rush to Tanzania. In Dar es Salaam he was astonished to find that his previously good friend Jane Goodall was unwilling to supply names and addresses of her financial supporters around the world, so that Hamburg could not approach them for help on the ransom. Goodall had divorced the Dutch photographer Baron Hugo van Lawick and married Derek Bryceson, an Englishman, who was violently anti-American. She was deeply influenced by Bryceson, who was Director of National Parks for Tanzania and a Member of Parliament.

A longtime African-American friend of mine, Beverly Carter, the American Ambassador to Dar, was appalled by Jane Goodall's attitude and Bryceson's venomous remarks. President Mobutu of Zaire wanted no negotiations with the rebels and got Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to pressure the Ambassador not to help Hamburg. Beverly disregarded Kissinger and lent full assistance, including providing Hamburg a short wave radio. Kissinger punished Carter by denying him his scheduled post in Copenhagen and demoting him to a post in the sinkhole of Monrovia. It was not surprising that the expensive Jane Goodall Primate Center at Stanford was only one-fourth completed when, in face of campus criticism, Jane Goodall withdrew as a Stanford professor.

Andries asked me to tell him about Jane Goodall. He was aware of her brilliant work at her Gombe Stream station in Tanzania. He respected her courage and admired her academic achievements. "But why did Leakey pick her to study chimps," he asked.

I drew a breath: "On the surface she was a fairly bright young woman who had finished Bournemouth High School. Her mother, Vanne Goodall, was a friend of Louis Leakey. That is probably the connection that got her a job as his secretary.

“Was there something more intimate between them?” he asked.

“Not between Louis and Jane,” I replied adding, “although Louis did love to be surrounded by adoring females. His many female scientific proteges were not matched by male ones.”

Andries pulled at an earlobe as though my answer was not complete.

“I still don’t understand.”

“No, that’s it. Jane Goodall is an extremely strong personality and enormously talented. Other people have asked your question. There has been a wild rumor around London that Jane was Louis’ daughter. I don’t believe a word of it. It is true that neither Mary nor Richard Leakey were happy with Louis’ efforts to gain financial support for his “trimates.” But they had good scientific reasons. Louis happened to be staying with Vanne in London when he died, so that may have added to the gossip.”

That seemed to satisfy Andries intense interest in the subject. But then he shifted to Dian Fossey.

“How don’t tell me that Leakey was a friend of the Fossey woman’s mother.”

“No, I don’t think Louis ever met Dian’s mother or stepfather, from whom she was quite alienated. They lived in San Francisco and may have come to a lecture in the Palace of the Fine Arts where I introduced Louis. Afterwards there was the usual press of female scientific groupies surrounding Louis on that stage. I kept trying to get him off the stage to a luncheon but he was basking in the feminine adulation. As sort of a concluding statement he said grandiosely that he wouldn’t have anyone studying gorillas in Rwanda who hadn’t had their appendix out.

“A fortnight later, when Louis arrived at the National Geographic meeting in Washington to pick from a list of people to study the gorilla, Dian was well down the list.

But there was also the telegram from Dian which said, in effect, 'Appendix out, when do I start?'

Andries shook his head in amused disbelief.

At lunch there was no further talk of the African visitors. Our trictrac session ended abruptly as Andries reached the agreed-upon target of twenty points in three games. This gave me a chance to open the difficult question.

"Andries," I said, "assuming that a well-meaning and even dedicated man produced a cross between two primates, one of them human, isn't there every possibility that the experimenter would be crucified by human society as some sort of Frankenstein monster, profaning God and subject to criminal charges for bestial behavior?"

Andries picked up one of the red checkers and nervously tapped the trictrac table before speaking.

"Nedt, you are probably right, and that is why it should not be done. *Homo sapiens* are proud of what they have done in breeding cattle by selective crosses, and they have improved human welfare by doing so. Others have made large fortunes by breeding thoroughbred horses. Still others create expensive new breeds of dogs, even though the new breed may suffer from extreme nervousness and other afflictions. It is enough that it can win a show prize.

"Monkeys are crossed without anyone questioning the morality of it. And I don't suppose that if an orang and gorilla were to be mated, artificially or otherwise, there would be much of an outcry. But if the primate of a cross were to be human, then *Homo sapiens*' exalted idea of the status of his species would lead him to regard that cross as monstrous.

"Mind you, Nedt, the more I have thought about where our planet is going—and I've had lots of time to think here in the Ruwenzori—the more I foresee that the larger primates will come to interact with one another in a hundred ways. We do need communication at a far greater level of

sophistication than sign language, but this is not necessarily a prerequisite for a lot of medical developments.

“Someday the techniques will be improved so that the heart of a chimp or a baboon may be able to replace a human heart. We will need to know a lot more about immunology that we don’t now understand and can’t control, but it is a distinct possibility. The hearts of baboons and even of the large monkeys are probably too small to transplant to humans, and a gorilla heart may be too large. But someone will obviously realize that a young gorilla heart may perfectly match the somewhat elastic cavity occupied by the human heart. Of course, it might continue to grow and therefore cause problems, but medical experience suggests that it would adjust to the human cavity.”

Suddenly my patience was again exhausted. I poured myself some coffee and took it outside, ready to begin more clearing. It was almost as though he was playing with my feelings. Why couldn’t he just admit the existence of a child and let me observe? Why didn’t I just blurt out my question? The thought made me perspire before I had even swung the axe. “After dinner,” I promised myself almost aloud, “I will have my answer.” As my axe bit deep into the thick sapling, I thought, “without any excuses.”

I needed time to think. I went over my assumptions. Was I right to be convinced that if I threatened to leave, Andries would kill me to protect his secret? I had heard so much about his secretiveness before I met him that fear had dominated my first visit. But he had given me no concrete evidence for alarm. On the other hand, if a “scientist” wanted to use someone for an experiment and then dispose of him when no longer needed, the “scientist” wouldn’t exactly give a warning.

Still another hypothesis seemed equally valid—namely, that he would want to use me to make his extraordinary achievements known to the scientific world. I could under-

stand his personal reticence because of his flickering eyelids and his bad experiences. But that could make me his Boswell and publicist. I concluded, though I could not know for sure, that some of my fear of Andries was possibly unwarranted.

It began to rain heavily. Jagged bolts of lightning fenced with an unseen foe across the mountain. I got that isolated, eerie feeling again. It felt good to go back to the cabin, within the warm yellow ambiance of the kerosene lamps.

Chapter 6

With characteristic impatience, I kept trying to press my host for details. But he would have none of it. There was still a lot of trust I had to earn. One afternoon he sat me down in his library, pushed aside the trictrac and asked with an edge to his voice:

“What do you tell American students about this country?”

“What should I tell them?” I replied. “You know so much more than I do.”

“No,” he countered with a stern tone. “I want to know what you would say if asked about Rwanda?”

“Well,” I began, “I would describe the people and make it clear that the Tutsi are less than ten percent of the population. The Batwa or Pygmies may be one percent. But the great majority are Hutu.”

“And...” his hands motioned for me to go on.

I continued, thinking what I had told students.

“The Tutsi are a generally tall people who own cattle and who dominate the shorter Hutu who form a peasant class. The Tutsi had developed, over more than a century, a detailed central government with a host of rituals and religious practices that thoroughly buffaloed the Hutu.”

“Buffaloed?” he questioned.

“Oh, that is an American expression that means to intimidate and confuse and perhaps dazzle another person

or group. Older boys in school often find ways to buffalo their juniors.”

“Continue.”

“Well, this continued generation after generation. But with the spread of Christianity and education—you Belgians provided better schooling than the Germans when you took over after World War II—the Hutu finally saw through the vast discrimination practiced by the Tutsi.

“And I would tell students about the Hutu revolt of 1959, where there was a massive exodus of those Tutsi who had not been slaughtered. In many ways the roles were reversed.”

Van Straeten ran his fingers through his gray hair.

“You do tell them that both peoples speak Kinyarwanda?”

“Of course.”

“And that with concubinage and what passed for intermarriage, the distinction between tall Tutsi and short Hutu has become a stereotype with many exceptions?”

“Of course I tell them that. And about Rwanda being a country of many small villages.”

“Nedt,” he paused, “the Hutu won’t keep the Tutsi down. They are a warrior class and they will come back. You Americans may not like it from a democratic viewpoint. But the Tutsi will come back. And you people will support them because they will bring order and discipline.”

I was reluctant to agree. But van Straeten seemed satisfied and changed the subject by ninety degrees. He so often discoursed on the long history of efforts to link Africans and black people in general to the higher primate. Andries could be very long winded so I’ll summarize his views.

* * *

In 1775, when the physiologist Johann Blumenbach revised the pioneering zoological categories established by Linnaeus a generation before, he placed the white man farthest from the apes. It may be found in *On the Natural Va-*

riety of Mankind (1775) in Bendshy, translated and edited Treatises of Blumenbach. Andries had selected statements such as that blacks are “as neer beasts as may be” (Barbados, 1757), and that Negroes are “almost as equally wild, and as ugly as these apes” (Paris, 1770), and that male apes have had intercourse with Negro females (London, 1772). These are typical of hundreds of associations of Negroes with apes that have gained popularity from three simple coincidences: both come from Africa; both are of dark color; and both have a degree of prognathism, or angle of the face. In the early days of American slavery, the inhuman treatment of slaves was rationalized by some on the grounds that Negroes were akin to apes. There has been no lack of racist propaganda since—right up to the present time.

In nineteenth-century Europe, and in the American bible belt today, emotions are strong regarding the Great Apes, Man, and Evolution. More than a century ago Disraeli coined his famous phrase at an Oxford meeting: Is man “an ape or an angel? My Lord, I am on the side of the angels.” This led Sir Osbert Sitwell to comment in a fairly recent poem, “I love in man the ape, not the angel.”

In the last century, when the idea of man’s descent through sin from the angels, with the possibility of returning to grace in angelic form was common, the introduction of the Darwinian thought that man may have descended from a common ancestor of the Great Apes produced a confrontation with Christianity. Apes had been symbols of evil in Christian Europe from the Middle Ages, as Andries’ innumerable contemporary quotations bore out. The best account of many Andries had on his shelf was H. W. Janson’s *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*.

Later Thomas Nashe used the ape to represent the wantonness of women. John Donne in 1601 stressed the sensu-

ality and lust attributed to apes, as these few lines suggest:

It quickened next a toyful Ape, and so
 Gamesome it was, that it might freely goe
 From tent to tent, and with the children play.
 His organs now so like theirs he doth finde,
 That why he cannot laugh, and speake his minde,
 He wonders. Much with all, most he doth stay
 With Adams fifth daughter Siphaticia,
 Doth gaze on her, and, where she passeth, passe,
 Gathers her fruits, and tumbles on the grasse,
 And wisest of that kinde,
 the first true lover was.

Ape-rape was the theme of an English play in 1589 and of a Milanese one in 1608. The "apes" of this period were not, of course, the Great Apes, although some scholars think that the Carthaginian explorer Hanno voyaged in the fifth century B.C. to the vicinity of Sierra Leone, and that he did meet gorillas, capture them, and bring back skins.

The theme of Great Apes in modern European society is recurrent, and with not so bad an image. Peacock's novel of 1817, concerning an ape as a member of the British parliament, turned the ape's lack of speech to his advantage because it engendered a reputation of being a deep thinker. And fifty years later, Charlotte Brontë suggested that monkeys "have the power of speech if they would but use it." She saw them as concealing such an ability lest it be used against them. But the literary tide did not turn entirely. Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver" found apes disgusting. It was left to Kafka to write of an ape and to be on the side of the ape.

The films of *King Kong* are racist or "apeist." Such prejudice is found in the popular song about Bad Leroy Brown "...even as bad as King Kong."

The two factors are linked. There are often racist and chauvinist overtones in the way in which advertisements depict the muscular black gorilla holding a nubile, naked, white female either in his clutches or, as in *King Kong*, in the palm of his hand. Although the white heroine was actually zoophilic, I had told Andries about John Simon's review of the film in *New York Magazine* being headlined "Ape Rape." The tender aspects of the King Kong fantasy do not project in the scare advertising, which represents gorillas as primate villains as terrifying as the Great White Shark.

In the San Francisco North Beach area, where the "skin" industry has long been rampant, at a time when the entrepreneurs felt that the bottom had fallen out of the topless business, they introduced an act in which a topless "native girl" sacrificed a topless white girl to a stuffed gorilla. At the thought, I had a moue of distaste.

This sexism/racism aspect is also not new, especially among Anglo-Saxons. The eighteenth-century comment by the scientific writer Buffon that apes are "equally ardent for women as their own females," is typical. Or the accusation in 1772 in London by the planter Edward Long that: "The lower class of women in England are remarkably fond of the blacks for reasons too brutal to mention; they would connect themselves with horses and asses, if the laws permitted them."

A weaving together of myths regarding black sexuality, submissiveness of women, gorilla sexual aggressiveness, and black as ugly creeps into our society today, even where least expected. For example, in the television show of the black comedian Redd Foxx, the character of Aunt Esther was frequently called the "gorilla." Is this to put her down as a black woman, or is it another use of the word "gorilla" to mean ugly? Even Muhammad Ali spoke with contempt when he described his fight as "Thrill a gorilla in Manila."

Another television low blow was on the highly acclaimed CBS program "60 Minutes," with the comment that a Democratic Congress investigating Korean bribe money is like asking King Kong to dab on deodorant because he is smelly. The association of "bad smells" of any primate has long been explained by (a) sanitary facilities, and (b) the body odors produced by varying diets. But the canard about "Negro odor" persists. In many years I had actually lived in Africa—West, East, and South—I noted how much more meticulous most Africans are about bathing than are the peoples in Western Europe.

I was conscious of the good Andries was doing in confronting the racist myths and sexism that linked black Africans, especially African women, to gorillas. Here was a man whose sensitivity for living creatures exceeded that of the late Dr. Albert Schweitzer. By coincidence, both Andries and I visited the hospital in Lambaréné in 1950, though not at the same time. Perhaps Schweitzer, whose surprisingly biased depreciation of African abilities both Andries and I heard in the great man's own words, did influence Andries to see a new world coming. Andries decided not to offer his services to Schweitzer because of the renowned philosopher's anti-African feelings. But Andries was stimulated to conceive of a world in which all primates would live much more closely together and in which by no means all of the intellectual input would come from humans.

For all of Andries liberalism regarding people of color and sensitivity towards non-human creatures, we often disagreed about the status of women. His father had been a great admirer of Friedrich Nietzsche. Andries sometimes quoted the German philosopher. I've never been able to fathom or excuse much of Nietzsche. Certainly not his most blatantly sexist canard that "when a woman becomes a scholar there is usually something wrong with her sexual

organs.” I wondered would Andries feel differently about a daughter compared with a son?

I’ve now covered more than one van Straeten monologue. But I must admit that he was convincing and really quite charming. When I appeared a bit bored, and he would take a rare book off the unpainted wooden shelf to quote to me.

I knew he was leading up to something.

Never far from my thoughts was the issue, if he had a daughter, of producing a three-fourths human child. One question hung in my mind: Why would he want me to be the father of his grandchild. After all, he could be both father and grandfather. If he had relations once, why not again?

One night over trictrac he had plunged into the question:

“Has there ever been any evidence that the ancient Egyptian rulers really suffered genetic breakdowns because of their practice of brothers marrying sisters?” I knew when Andries was being rhetorical. He went to the bookcase, pulled out a volume, thumbed it, and gave me the following passage to read from John Gower’s *Confessions of a Penitent Lover*, from the fourteenth century, in which Gower goes back to the time of Cain and Abel and remarks:

Forthi, that time it was no sinne
The sister for to take hire brother,
Than that ther was of chois non other.

Andries asked me: “Would not brothers and sisters who were the first half-human/half-gorilla offspring be, in a very literal sense, starting back at the time of Cain and Abel in the creation of what might someday be a new species of primates?”

I had made no verbal reply but nodded my head in the affirmative.

“But Nedt,” he continued, “Come down to the Roman authors and to special circumstances. Ovid describes Canace as being pregnant by her lover/brother, and when she is about to give birth, Macareus marries her. It was not just the gods but the sons and daughters of the gods who, in special circumstances, could mate without the sanction of incest. After all, even Cleopatra married her brother Ptolemy Dionysus. And the Ptolemys were only following the practice of the Pharaohs.

“The practice is by no means frowned upon as often as one would think. Today, German gypsies allow it. And the Maoris sometimes did it to keep a certain property intact in one family. It is also reported among the Incas.”

Andries had been speaking of formal consanguineous marriage, which is extremely rare in Western society. But, as I pointed out to him, sexual relationships are not as rare, especially between brother and sister, as is generally believed in a society where legal, religious, and social sanctions are so strong.

It was then, as now, extremely difficult for me to recapture the precise shading of Andries' comments. Was he referring to a daughter *and* a son of his? Naturally, his thinking had gone far ahead of mine. The boy and girl siblings would almost certainly have sexual urges.

If there were twins and they were not taught otherwise, or kept physically apart, wouldn't they turn to each other as their sexual drives mounted? Would a half-gorilla female mature sexually at the human age of twelve or at the gorilla age of six, or somewhere in between?

“Andries,” I began, “would the fact that the female is a twin have an effect on her ability to conceive?” I had carefully not specified whether the sperm might be gorilla or human, or even her own half-human brother's.

He looked up, as he often did, searching for some motivation behind the question. I quietly put a tablespoon of

the rough brown sugar in my tea.

“Are you thinking of freemartins?”

“I don’t know much about them, but one summer as a kid on a farm in northern Michigan I remember the farmer explaining something.”

“Well, the word is the same in English and French. To answer your question: yes, I have considered what you raise. But the problem is really only common, as far as I know, in cattle and in some goats. In cattle a male twin may share blood circulation with his female twin and produce a sex reversal in the female. Or at the least her reproductive system is maldeveloped.”

“You mean she might be turned into a male?”

“No, but into a hermaphrodite that would be sterile. The condition has been known by European cattle breeders at least from the seventeenth century, but scientific study of it started only recently. It is probably caused by sex chromosome mosaicism, and. . . .”

Andries broke off in mid sentence. I knew the sign. He always discussed science or genetics dispassionately as though it all took place on another continent, if not another planet. But when he got that look in his flickering eyes, I suspected he was thinking of his children. The idea that if he has a twin daughter she might be a true or pseudo hermaphrodite was such anathema that his mind just shut down. That ended the discussion and I went for a walk.

* * *

Returning to the cabin, I suddenly froze as I heard voices. Andries was speaking French. There were at least two other voices—Africans, I thought, by the accent. My urge to flee battled with my curiosity and concern for van Straeten. The resolution was to go silently around the cabin and crouch down under the back window of the main lounge.

My French isn’t the best, but I was sure I got the

gist of it. The two visitors were guerrillas from the same group of Marxists who had come before, the ones who had kidnapped the Jane Goodall people. They needed van Straeten to carry a message for them to Dar es Salaam. The guerillas referred to "your friends"—who would be safe if van Straeten carried out the mission. Were they referring to me? Did they know about offspring? One of them had apparently brought in building supplies for van Straeten and knew something about him. But how much. Was he being blackmailed?

Suddenly, I heard phrases from van Straeten: "Excuse-moi. . . quinze minute. . . très important." I thought I heard him leave the front of the cabin and I moved to the far edge. He was walking hurriedly down the path. I "Psst," but it wasn't loud enough. I feared to go after him and returned to my position under the window.

The word I kept hearing from the guerrillas was "muti"—*mingi muti*. They spoke Kiswahili between themselves and sometimes another African language that I couldn't understand. The fifteen minutes van Straeten had mentioned was almost over when I began to get the drift of the two men's discussion. It made my stomach churn. I knew that the hands and feet of gorillas were considered magic medicine, or "muti," by the local peoples and even by some abroad. But how much more valuable and how many more shillings could be got for rare and exotic feet and hands that had a human quality. The bile actually rose in my throat and I put up my hand to stop myself from vomiting and making noise. I sweated and leaned against the wall.

I should have intercepted van Straeten on his way back; coming toward the cabin he would have seen me on the corner. But I was so sickened by the plan to amputate that the next thing I knew van Straeten was back in the cabin, again speaking French. I heard him agree to meet the Marxists at dusk at the bottom of the trail going down

the mountain where they said they had a landrover.

The two Africans left, and I waited until I saw them disappear down the trail without looking back. Van Straeten was relieved to see me. His tone was a little gruff, perhaps to cover his own feelings:

“Nedt, I have to go away for a few days. That man you heard once in the cabin was here again. They need my help on a project. You will stay and watch the cabin, won’t you?”

It was the first time Andries had directly asked a favor. He was not now the stern and lonely man in complete charge of his environment. In fact, he looked terribly vulnerable. It hurt to see him so anguished.

“Of course, Andries,” I reassured him, “how long is a few days?”

“Well, I have to go to Dar. It may be as much as a week. I’m glad I got supplies in Kisenyi. If you have to go there for more, please be careful.”

I expected that he would want me to take food to his offspring. But perhaps he wasn’t quite ready for that. I heard him pacing in the night. The next day he said he had decided not to go. But he warned that armed men might come seeking revenge for a favor he promised and then didn’t deliver.

Chapter 7

True to my self-promise to get to the bottom of the intrigue, I challenged Andries while he was fixing dinner. But not before I had drunk two long brandies. He was winding the key in a tin of ham when I broached the subject. My voice was tense, though I was trying to sound casual.

“I’ve been meaning to ask you,” I began, “from what you said during my last visit about tiglons and ligers, what are the prospects of interbreeding among the higher primates?”

I didn’t mention man specifically, but my question was direct enough.

“What do you mean?” He stopped turning the key and looked up at me. “Set up the tric trac.” It was almost a command and a diversion.

I was already pouring my third long brandy. Now was no time to falter, even at the risk of arousing his anger.

“Well, you mentioned the use of gorilla hearts in humans. If a heart can be transplanted, surely there can be interbreeding.”

“Oui! I believe in such transplants. I ask you, my friend, what mother and father would let their child die because of some repugnance?”

“But Andries,” I asked, rather overcome with the scope of his thoughts, “wouldn’t there be a great deal of religious

objection to such procedures?"

He smiled, almost cynically. "I do believe we need a strong moral basis for our relations with the higher primates and I hope that someday [he was still not admitting that anything had happened out there down the path] I may make a contribution. But I have no doubt that when individual human lives are at stake and a heart transplant from another primate can save a human life, then there will be a way to overcome repugnance of any kind. We are all aware—God knows there was so much of it during the war—that humans will do dreadful things to one another in order to survive, or even for reasons of ideology. We have a language split and in part a religious split in Belgium, as you well know. But it is only a few hundred years since Catholics would burn nonbelievers. Why should we be squeamish about gorillas if it means saving a life?"

"When will all of this be likely to begin?" I asked.

"As a matter of fact, I'm not sure that the actual cross-fertilization of human beings with other great primates has not occurred. You wouldn't have heard about it. But in Europe and America there are a number of labs using chimpanzees for experimentation that are extremely secretive about what takes place in them."

"Andries, are you serious? Surely we would know about it if such work were undertaken."

"Nedt, my boy, who would know if we made a genetic advance here in Ruwenzori? It would be a simple matter in one of your American labs to impregnate a chimpanzee with human spermatozoa and then abort between four and eight weeks later to find out what happened. No one outside of a few researchers need know."

"But, but. . .," I started my sentence and began again. "But this would be such a tremendous development, like it or hate it, in the evolution of primates that I wonder if such news could be kept secret. After all, the news in Italy

about fertilizing a human ovum outside a human mother and keeping it alive for weeks was published.”

“This is different,” her replied. His voice seemed to settle something, and he went back to opening the canned ham. We ate without much conversation, as though we were gathering ourselves up like dark clouds before rain. Then Andries gave a shrug as if to say, if you don’t want to believe, you will never believe, and came to the point: “Nedt, if you ever find out that there has been a human cross with another primate, you might think back to our conversation. Here, let me pour you a nightcap.” And he began to put the trictrac pieces back into their box.

We sat in silence for a while. Then I made a move to retire to my cot. Andries motioned me to sit down again.

“Do not misunderstand me, Nedt. We have come a long way in our scientific knowledge of man and his origins. But we are just beginning.” Again he motioned with his hand for me to stay seated while he got up and went to the bookcase. He took out what I could see from the cover was an old issue of *Scientific American* and thumbed through it.

“You see, my friend, even one of your most eminent American scientific writers, Henry Fairfield Osburn, wrote in 1926 what we now know to be absolute scientific rubbish. Listen to this: ‘The standard of intelligence of the average adult Negro is similar to that of an eleven-year-old of the species *Homo sapiens*.’ And then he condescends to say—now listen—that ‘The intelligence and morale of the Mongolian may fully reach the high Caucasian level, as shown by great periods of Chinese history. . . .’”

Why is it, I thought, impatiently playing with a piece of string, that almost every serious subject with Andries has to turn into a seminar. Even a game like trictrac became the subject of a dissertation. But I was making progress and mentally gritted my teeth to hear him out.

I had missed something he was saying as I mused, but I caught myself as his homily continued:

“Despite such arrogance by your distinguished American scientist, the whole thrust of his article was to refute the 1875 pre-Darwinian interpretation of Professor Armand de Quartrefages of the Museum of Natural History in Paris, who argued that different species could not interbreed. I knew Quartrefages’ grandson when I was a student. We were both interested in hybridization and the many benefits that have come from it, both botanically and zoologically. In fact, my first interest in the possibility of interbreeding between the great apes and man may have come from these student discussions.”

I was almost asleep and got up to retire, but Andries had to have a last word.

“So you see, a scientist who refutes foolish rubbish in 1926 now sounds like a fool himself decades later. Those who categorically deny that we and the great apes can interbreed will soon sound even more foolish.” And with that he turned his back and began to undress for bed.

I hesitated, afraid to push too hard. I’m glad I didn’t, because after I was in bed he came to the curtained door of my part of the hut to say:

“Good night Nedt. Tomorrow I’ll prove something to you about primate crosses. Good night.”

Needless to say, it took me a long time to go to sleep. As I lay awake, I heard every noise in the montane forest.

I awakened to hear a knock on the door. I jumped up before I heard Andries answer: “Ja.” Could it be the Marxist? Had he come with friends? But why, if he were hostile, would he knock? With only my pants on, I went into the main room. Andries looked at me without saying a word as he pulled a sweater down over his pajamas. He motioned me to open the door.

It was the Mbuti Pygmy. But I didn’t recognize him

at first. His face had been slashed. Was it a panga that had laid open the whole right side of his face? One eye was closed and bloody. With the other he looked at Andries, who—the impression is distinct to this day—seemed to shrink back. The Pygmy swayed as I rushed forward to steady him and lead him to my bed. Andries brought me a basin of water and some towels. I began to clean and bind the horrible wound. My inability to speak his language was frustrating, so I kept asking “Why?” in French: “Pourquoi, pourquoi?” His one eye searched mine. He wanted to speak but he knew I didn’t know his language or the Efé Pygmy the waiter had used. Then he kept saying a word: “mvumangu,” and then “mvumangu–mvumbi.” They were two distinct words. Where was Andries? I found him outside smoking his pipe. I was annoyed. When I repeated the words, he said he didn’t recognize them.

Back with the Mbuti, I examined the wound again. It was definitely not a tear, such as might have been made by the teeth of a lion; it was the result of a clear, sharp blow by a blunt instrument.

The Pygmy repeated the words: “mvumangu–mvumbi.” His voice was indistinct and his head lolled to one side. He was dead. I felt that I was watching a movie.

I went outside again and found Andries at the edge of the clearing digging a grave. It seemed macabre. How had he anticipated the Mbuti’s death that way? Why had the Mbuti come? Who killed him? Was it Simbas whom we both should now fear? Andries seemed unconcerned. Was it the Marxist band? Did Andries expect the murder? Did he know about it in advance? Was this revenge?

As I write, I do wonder why I didn’t ask these questions. But Andries had a way of preempting any questions. And I was still trying to stay in his good graces in order to meet the children. I carried the Pygmy out—he weighed about sixty pounds—and laid him gently in the shallow grave.

Immediately, without looking at the corpse, Andries began to shovel back the earth. Later I saw that he had put some heavy rocks on it to keep animals from digging there if they caught the scent of blood.

The words “mvumangu” and “mvumbi,” which I wrote down as best I could from the dying Pygmy’s pronunciation, were almost certainly Kikongo. They meant “a fight” and “death.” Knowing I couldn’t speak Efé Pygmy, the victim had consciously used the only other language in which he knew some words. Of course, I may have been mistaken on the exact Kikongo words. He might have said not “mvumbi” for death, but “mvumba” for mouth, to indicate he wanted water. I’ll never know.

At the time, I was stunned by the Mbuti’s unexpected visit, his death, and Andries’ strange behavior. It was about nine o’clock and the sun had burned off the haze when Andries returned from his grave-filling, came in, washed his hands, and began to boil water for chai. No word or explanation. No sadness. No direct eye contact. Nothing.

I was bothered. After all someone had killed the Pygmy. Surely a half-gorilla son would be able to wield a blunt instrument—the crushed skull had truly been shattered. If so Andries must know it. Maybe that was why he showed neither remorse or surprise. Would he react the same if I were killed?

I decided to ignore the disturbing experience for the moment and went right back to our conversation of the night before. “What level of intelligence would you expect to result from a human cross with another advanced primate?”

Andries pulled up the sleeves of his gray sweater to keep them out of the grease that spattered as he turned the canned bacon. “That is a foolish question. What do we know about the intelligence of other primates now? Pygmies think I am dumb because I don’t have their forest lore to track and to hunt. But I haven’t needed that kind

of intelligence. Besides, who does the measuring and by what standards? Until we can communicate, it is too hard to judge.”

He turned from the stove, the corners of his mouth lifted in a half smile, then turned back to the bacon as he told me about an incident that occurred when he was in secondary school and went with his classmates on a visit to Holland. They had watched a chimp being taught clever little mimics at a sideshow in a circus. He felt that the chimp, and so many others, were either being treated as buffoons or as a means by which the ignorant human voyeurs could flatter their egos as being superior primates.

“Do you realize,” he said as he put the breakfast on the table, “what happens to a human child if it is taken from its mother at birth, never sees another human being, and then at the age of four or five someone tries to teach it tricks?” He went on, “With all the vaunted human intelligence, the human child is permanently stunted in his growth if there has been that degree of deprivation. Why must people think that other primates do not suffer in the same way? And besides that. . . .”

I cut him off. I was weary of his digressions. Suddenly, he seemed to have lost that humane touch I had so admired. The Pygmy’s death had left me really shaky. But van Straeten seemed oblivious.

“Yes,” I said, “I understand why it is unreasonable to try to teach the higher primate if teaching didn’t begin at infancy.

“That’s what is wrong with the dolphin experiments. First, they try with mature dolphins and then they try to understand sounds that are highly complicated. If you start with very young dolphins they will learn if you give them semaphore signals that are simple.”

Andries, always the intellectual, seemed to cogitate my idea, but before he could reply I went on:

“Andries, there is something you are not telling me.” I felt the perspiration gather on my forehead. I hesitated about looking to see if the box with the Kalashnikov was unlocked, and kept my eyes on the Belgian.

“Yes, Nedt,” his words came out as though he were relieving himself of some great burden, “there is something I want you to see. Soon you can come with me down the path...” his voice trailed off as though waiting for an assent.

I nodded affirmatively, trying not to tremble from fear or excitement.

“But first we must have a good walk and a serious talk.”

* * *

At the end of the day we sat silently on the stoop. Twilight was falling like gray silk over the Ruwenzori. Elephantine thunderclouds were huddled over where we could no longer see the hot plains. Suddenly a zigzagging bolt of lightning unzipped the sky and let the rain fall out. The air had cleared in more sense than one.

Chapter 8

I awoke the next morning shivering. A freezing wind that had sharpened itself on the icy peaks of the Ruwenzori, blew through my open window. When I went into the main room, Andries had a most welcome cup of steaming coffee waiting for me.

“Hou gaan dit?” (“How goes it” in Afrikaans, which Andries could understand because it was so much like Flemish.)

He didn’t reply. I guess he didn’t like the gray day. He had said once that he never wanted to spend another winter under the heavy slate-gray skies of Belgium.

“Nedt,” he spoke crisply. I could tell that he meant business. “I want you to meet Hanna and Thys.”

No beating about the bush. No apologies. No explanation that they were half human. Just, “I want you to meet Hanna and Thys.”

I swallowed twice and then sought to fill the silence. My voice was a bit squeaky in its pitch.

“When?”

“Tomorrow.”

I thought, why not today? He seemed to read my mind.

“Our supplies are running low. This is the last of the coffee. I don’t like to drive after so much rain, but I’m going to Kisenyi.”

“Fine,” I replied. “When will you be back?”

"Tomorrow après-midi."

I went to my room and returned to offer him three twenty dollar bills saying, "Let me pay my share."

"Merci," he said as he took them. "You do want to meet Hanna and Thys, don't you?"

"Yes." I again sounded a bit shrill, though I was trying not to be overanxious. I thought I'd better show that I took his offer as an honor and added, "I'm glad that you trust me, Andries."

He studied me as I spoke and I felt self-conscious. But all he said was, "Bon." With a small bag he had packed, he went out to the landrover, and after struggling to get it started he disappeared through the tall grass.

I sat down, perspiration gathering on my forehead. At last I was to see the half-gorilla children. Their existence was no longer in doubt. My excitement gave way to apprehension the more I thought about it. Under the pressure from the Marxists and his betrayal of them, would Andries immediately want me to perform the role of sire? And then dispatch me? I got up and began to pace nervously. If he wasn't going to Dar but merely to Kisenyi for supplies, he wouldn't need me to feed the children for just two days.

Within two hours of his departure the itch of curiosity overtook me, and I paced up and down outside the cabin to relieve the tension. If Andries had not promised me that I could see his children, I would have gone for a peek. We had been together a long time. Answers to my burning questions were, I knew, soon to come. My inquisitiveness could keep another day.

My curiosity was equalled by a growing fear at being alone in that isolated cabin. By mid-afternoon, I began to wonder what would happen if the visitor returned. I immediately rushed inside to the wall-seat chest where the Kala was stored. It was padlocked. I'd never seen the padlock before. I got down on my hands and knees and

saw tiny pieces of wood on the floor from the screws that held a new hasp. Did Andries distrust me after all? Was I being set up in some macabre way? I began to sweat profusely. After a while I began to conjecture what I would do if Andries never returned. Would I go down "the path"? Would the children welcome me or kill me? Could they survive alone in the forest? Would I feel bound to stay or would I leave them to the kind of death that overtakes other primates more often, perhaps, than our own species? I sat down on Andries' bed and watched the door. For perhaps five minutes I just listened. And while I listened, my sense of isolation grew ominous. Physical activity can reduce tension, and for that reason, as well as for a growing feeling that I must get away from the cabin, I decided to take a stiff walk up the mountain.

As I walked away from the cabin, climbing regularly, I still felt very isolated. The vegetation never looked more strange, with the tussocks of moss and the liverworts that held water like sponges. At 7,000 feet I passed the familiar landmark of the first of the giant lobelias, with its distinctive five stalks towering twenty feet into the blue sky. But my eyes were also on the faint trail Andries and I had made with our walks. The flowers were almost unreal, especially the snake lily with its distinct green, white, and brown spots, and when I paused for breath a vivid scarlet *Amaryllis* with its upside-down bell-like blossoms swayed in the light breeze. My ears almost strained to hear them toll. The sound would not have been surprising.

Andries' ideas had so dominated my thinking that I needed this walk to gather my thoughts. One moment the forest was alive with sounds and the next it was dead still. But it wasn't listening to my musings or comforting me. The Mbuti's death meant that the only human, so far as I knew, who could lead any searching friends to find me had joined his ancestors. His death saddened and terrified me.

My cottony mouth was enough to tell me that my body chemistry also knew a crisis was approaching.

As I kept climbing, the slope became steeper. For a while I concentrated on putting one foot in front of the other. I realized that I was tense with anticipation, but also relieved. My mind leapt ahead. After I see the children tomorrow, I will know that they are real. I will have really, really seen them. When I have to leave, I will carry the secret with me.

Just the thought of leaving made me think of Johannesburg. I could picture myself soaking in Pierette's large British-type bathtub and leisurely reading the Sunday papers. One of the first things I would do would be to visit the American Library at USIS and read all the sports news. Then I thought of my need to write some political reports. It was good that Andries had spoken this morning. Time it was a-flying.

I was becoming winded and my panting brought me back to the mountain.

I stopped under a huge podocarpus tree. At 8,500 feet on this part of the mountain the tree seemed to demarcate the line where the giant wild banana had finally given up survival. The magnificent banana specimens that towered to sixty feet near Andries' cabin were only fifteen feet tall at this elevation. But just beyond them on the upward slope the giant heather was in its glory. If you have walked, as I have, in the Scottish Highlands, you know heather as a ground plant a foot or so tall, but in this strange environment the heather grows as trees that soar fifty feet or more. Nature seems to run wild in the Mountains of the Moon, and I thought how oddly fitting that this manifestation should apply also to primate genetics. The weird shapes of the giant heathers as they grew like wraiths brought to my mind the drawings of Arthur Rackman.

The eerie scenery seemed to gel with my weird thoughts

and the situation I was in. The setting created a mood for highly personal introspection. My thoughts were as jumbled as the branches of the giant heather. I looked across the clearing to the peak etched against the bright sky and realized that I had to cross my own chasm; my isolation had to end or I would. Just then, as though to comfort me in my solitude, a lone colobus monkey filed past. He was unusually high on the mountain and out of his normal vegetation zone. He looked like my Uncle Billy who, when I was a small boy in Illinois, came home from his career under sail. This creature had the same white whiskers, lined face, and jaunty air of an old salt.

I remembered something odd that Andries had told me. In the local language, Kinyarwanda, there is only one word for monkey—*Inguge*—which seems strange because the country has several species of monkeys. What a contrast with the Masaai, who have more than a hundred words for different color combinations in their cattle.

Suddenly a martial eagle, a massive bird at least three feet across, its belly white except for distinct black spots, swooped down below the giant heather. These eagles are known to capture hyrax, monkeys, and even small antelope. I wondered if they could carry the antelope at this altitude or if, like airplanes, they were affected by the thinness of the air. I peered down to where the martial eagle had struck to capture, I assumed, the lone colobus. But I saw nothing. The monkey may have been either too wise to be captured or so feeble that capture had been easy. In a sense I saw it as an analogy for my situation. I, too, was alone and out of my normal habitat. Only for Andries it was truly syntonic.

As I headed back down the slope my gait quickened more than usual on a return. I was oblivious to the jarring effect that would leave my calves aching the next day. I didn't look at the ground for snakes, but kept my eyes

at shoulder level. Did I sense danger from a much larger predator?

* * *

I had left the cabin door closed. It had no lock but it shut securely. From across the clearing I saw that it was open. My heart stopped, and so did I. Walking cautiously, I picked up a short, stout branch from the pile of logs. I listened outside the door for sounds. Only the leaves touching at the tops of the swaying trees broke the silence. I entered the cabin ready to strike. Instantly the powerful and distinctive odor of a gorilla (or half-gorilla) assailed my nostrils.

I took a quick inventory. A jar of biscuits lay open and empty on the floor. The kerosene refrigerator door was open—that I could not have left open by chance—and in front of it was a mess of partly eaten mangoes and apples that Andries had kept chilled for months, some tapioca pudding from two nights before, and several jam jars that had not been opened.

The pictures over Andries' bed had been taken down and lay on his bed. But they hadn't been torn off, since the nails that held them were still in the wall and not bent. I went to my room. All was in order except that my top blanket, a mustard-colored army one, was missing; the disarray of the bottom blanket showed that the top one had been pulled off. I reached for my pocket knife on my belt and was glad to find that I had not left it on my table as I usually did.

Fear turned to curiosity and back to fear. The acrid, persistent odor was so distinct and overpowering. Was it a smell of death? No, it was a palpable presence. One has strange recalls when under stress. I suddenly thought of Plutarch's account of Caesar at a dinner where the dis-course was death—which sort was the best? "That," he said, "which is unexpected." My knees felt weak. I closed

the outside door, put the bar across as we did at night, poured myself a brandy, and wound up the gramophone. But my anxiety was not allayed. The record Andries had left on was Camille Saint-Saëns' "Carnival des animaux." Its subtitle on the label was "Grande Fantaisie Zoologique." Andries liked the marvelous imitations of animal sounds made by the two pianos and the orchestra, but he disliked the allusion to a zoo. Under the circumstances, this wasn't the best record to listen to. The animal sounds that filled the room seemed to ring the forest all around me. Then as I turned to get down a can of soup, I thought I saw a face at the window. The adrenalin began to flow as I made myself go to the door and throw it open. I saw nothing but wisps of ground fog drifting past.

I must have picked up a dozen books that evening without reading one. The battery radio brought in the BBC news, and I learned of another state of unrest in the Congo. That reminded me that there must be numerous bands of guerillas roaming the eastern Congo looking for loot. If they came to the cabin, I wouldn't have a chance. Why in the hell hadn't van Straeten shown me how to use the Kala and left it with me? I don't like guns and I hope never to fire one at anybody. But that night a gun would have been a comfort.

Frenetic drum beats sounded suddenly to the east. My thoughts stopped. My heart pounded. I guessed that the drums couldn't be far away in the heavy growth. Although African drums beating in the night might seem ominous to most Americans, I would have found them comforting under different circumstances. Percussive instruments are dominant all over Black Africa. To people like me who live there for long periods, they become the friendly sounds of people talking, even though the words can't be understood. But here, now, on the Ruwenzori, it was different. In Rwanda drums may be used only by the King's family.

I trembled at the thought that the royal household was involved in the intrigue. Had the King and not the guerillas been responsible for the Mbuti's death?

The clutching pain in my stomach tightened as a second drum on the other side of me answered in a staccato beat. Did I feel pain because I had been poisoned somehow? Had the Pygmy been trying to warn me? I had no idea of what antidote there was, if any, to the secret poisons used to make enemies die excruciating deaths. Eventually the gripping pain subsided, but my pulse continued to race and skip.

It wasn't much of a night for sleeping. I guess I was surprised at my apprehension. I've been in a lot of tough spots in Africa and have even been under fire from time to time, and never lacked self-discipline and willpower. But this time morning sun would not come too soon.

Chapter 9

I was tense the moment I awoke. I threw back the comforter of hyrax skins and dressed quickly. In the main room I saw that the door was ajar. Perhaps Andries had come back and gone to warn his children that I would be coming! My skin tingled in anticipation.

As I was scrambling eggs, I thought I heard van Straeten and I went outside. It was overcast and muggy. A heavy rain during the night had quieted the symphony of the forest. I climbed the ladder of boards Andries had nailed to the trunk of a giant tree. From the lookout on top I could see no sign of him. To the east, toward Uganda, low patches of fog and mist blanketed the valleys below, creating an almost Shangri-La ambiance for what was to be the most important day in my life. All doubt had vanished. I was really on edge and as I returned to the cabin I decided not to have any coffee.

I was not more than back at the stove when Andries came in cheerfully with a "Bon jour." He gave no indication that today was the day. But on the other hand, somehow I felt a greater friendliness. As we sat down at the table for breakfast, he picked up the conversation from some nights before.

"Nedt, you asked me about the most important physiological differences between humans and the other higher primates."

"Yes, but somehow we changed the subject, or were we distracted by the news on the radio?"

He ignored my comment and went to his point. "What is important for my purposes now is what gorillas and man have in common that is different from chimpanzees, orangs and other primates."

"Yes," I nodded.

"Well, now, you yourself suggested the major difference. It is estrus. Have you considered the vast social consequences for a primate that does not have sexual estrus as compared with one that does?"

"What would happen, for instance, if among your American female college students living in the same dormitories, a small number of the women at any one time would be in heat and receptive to a wide range of male students? You may have a degree of promiscuity in the present lifestyle of such students, but nothing like what could occur with estrus. Furthermore, you would not have the pairing of male and female, married or not, that leads to some form of family unit. Most females today have at least a fairly good idea who the father of their children is. But given estrus, this link that can lead to a steady relationship and a male's concern for his children would not be nearly so important."

Van Straeten was clearly thinking beyond the biological existence of half-gorilla children to the social organization of this new species. Would the twins be used, I mused to myself, as a way of testing the "nature versus nurture" controversy? The father and his children were a social family. Van Straeten was left-handed. Would the children have copied him?

Andries cut off my inner speculation and brought me back to the topic he wanted to talk about:

"Estrus, my dear Nedt, has by no means been proved to exist in our ancestors. If you posit that humans lost it,

then gibbons have also lost it. Sexual swelling is the same.

“Common sense dictates that as primates grow larger, the size of their testes would increase proportionately. In the first place, there would be need for more ejaculate and sperm if it is to be injected into a much larger vaginal cavity. In the second place, the endocrinal function performed by the testes would need to be on a higher level in a larger primate. Therefore, one would naturally expect that a gorilla, being four times the size of a chimpanzee, would have testicles four times larger.”

“Yes,” I answered, falling into Andries’ trap.

“But what are the facts?” he asked with a slight smile. “The facts are that the gorilla testes are no larger than those of the chimpanzee.”

“Why?” I vocalized somewhat unnecessarily, because Andries rarely left me hanging.

“The most obvious reason, if you observe and think about it just a little bit, is that gorillas are monogamous, whereas chimpanzees incline towards promiscuity. A chimpanzee’s sperm is in competition with sperm from other chimpanzees in the fitness race. The one with the most sperm and the most fertile sperm will obviously have his genes survive, while the others will die.”

Somehow Andries’ professorial tone didn’t grate on me that morning. If there had to be one more “seminar” before I got to see the children, I could hear him out. So I replied with a questioning tone, “Is that absolutely true?”

“It is true that primates with monogamous habits have smaller testes in proportion to their size than primates who copulate more or less indiscriminately.

“I observed that there are in some primates strategies that would preclude the need for copious sperm. Dominant males do appear to know, at last in some species such as the baboons, what the peak of ovulation is in a female and can deposit their sperm at the most propitious time to

attempt to ensure that their genes will be carried forward.”

Andries' ideas were interesting, but my attention span on such broad questions was becoming very short. However, van Straeten always seemed to sense my impatience before it could erupt. Rather than cater to it, he would suppress it with further facts. Now he shifted his focus slightly, still the lecturer:

“You are probably taken in, my friend, by a lot of emotional writing in the American press. Just because rats will fight each other, and even cannibalize each other when food is short, is not reason to think that such behavior applies to animals universally.

“When food becomes short in some of our primate populations here in Africa, there is an absolute decrease in aggression. I presume it is because aggression is a luxury that cannot be afforded in the face of a common problem. If the problem is a food shortage, the primates know that they cannot expend precious energy in intense competition. But when our species will learn that is another question.”

Whenever he referred to “our species” it seemed to underline the presence nearby of what I kept thinking of as a “half-species.” Was he implying that a half-human species would display superior instincts for cooperative survival?

“Let's have another cup of coffee before we walk,” Andries said quite casually. It was the first reference he had made that morning to seeing his twins. He sat well away from me because I had a bad cold from walking in the rain. He must have sensed my question because he answered it:

“When we meet them, Nedt, perhaps you should stay well back.” Disappointment must have flickered across my face because he added, “At least until you are over your cold.”

As he was stirring in brown sugar, he became more direct. “When you see my children, don't be put off by the strong gorilla smell. You know that humans have their

own strong smell depending on their particular diet, and especially if there aren't bathing facilities."

I didn't take it personally even though I hadn't taken a dip in the lovely, clear, but cold mountain stream for three days because of a cold.

He went on: "Gorillas have far more sweat glands than humans do and, obviously, do not bathe as often as you are accustomed to. Their hair becomes soaked with perspiration. Actually, they don't have as many hairs per square inch as humans do, but the distribution is different and the hair is longer."

Finally, van Straeten said in an unusual tone of voice, "Nedt, let us have a walk. Being cooped up with the rain makes me restless." And then he quite obviously began gathering up food supplies—mostly fruit and nuts but also some leftover steak he had, and some milk he had brought from Kisenyi.

His continual reference to his children's gorilla ancestry disturbed me. "That I understand," I replied, "because even human hair can grow much longer than we are used to seeing it. Would a half-human look more human if he, being the short-haired sex, were groomed by a barber?"

"Yes, he would," he replied. "He would look much more human, and you would be surprised at the large areas of a gorilla's body that have no hair."

He paused and again I wondered why he always characterized his children as gorillas and not, perhaps, as humanoid or some other expression.

"Have you tried barbering on someone with lots of long hair on the head and body?"

"It wouldn't be wise to try it at this elevation. The chances of catching cold—look at yourself—and perhaps having it develop into pneumonia are too great here in the mountains, with all the forests, rains, and dampness. But I don't see why it couldn't be tried with a lowland gorilla.

It could certainly be done with gorillas who are captive in a hot country. And, Nedt, if we meet any friends of mine, please stay well away.”

It wasn't like Andries to repeat something like that. But his tension was clearly as great as my anticipation.

I did wonder if there were other than medical reasons to have me keep a distance. Several books in van Straeten's library had described how gorillas in captivity, upon meeting a visitor, get great pleasure in picking up their own manure and quite accurately throwing it at the newcomer.

As we left the shamba, an orange and blue lizard looked up from a log, its head pumping up and down, as though noting our departure. I looked back to be sure that Andries had closed the door. Maybe I'm squeamish I but don't like lizards crawling over me when I'm asleep. Besides, I rationalized my fear, a cobra could easily creep in an open door and curl up beside the still-warm stove.

As we walked along, van Straeten began to tell me what to look for in the children. I was in no mood for a seminar and most of the talk went over my head. My eye was on the trail and I knew I was tense when I jumped at the sight of a pangolin crossing in front of us. It looks like an armadillo but is toothless and only eats termites. I told Andries, I was surprised to see a pangolin in the daytime. Only in nature films had I seen the ten inch tongue flick out and then retract inside the chest of the animal. I started towards it and the pangolin curled up in a ball. Andries motioned me to stop and warned, “Don't get any closer, Nedt, it can spray you with urine and a really foul smelling secretion from its anal gland.” I moved back with alacrity, and we resumed our walk. As Andries returned to his describing his children a scarlet-chested bird took off from a tree ahead. A few moments later, I was startled by what sounded like a bell. I froze for a second, until Andries explained that it was a boubou; its mate soon

echoed it from the other side of the trail. The scent of wild jasmine added to an unreal feeling.

Meanwhile, Andries carried on with the scientific facts about the children. He spoke of Hanna and Thys as though I already knew them.

When we approached the site, he put a finger to his lips. As he turned to be sure I saw his signal, I was struck by how relaxed he seemed to be. His eyelids had definitely slowed down in their flickering. I hadn't really noticed them for days, but the marked slowing was as loud as silence after a cacophony of sound.

We stopped at the edge of a clearing. Some fifty yards away was a cabin about the size of his and constructed of the same kind of logs. Andries quickly took off all his clothes and put them in the crook of a tree, obviously by habit. He indicated to me that I should do the same. Now, I thought to myself, he isn't worried about my cold even though the sun had yet to penetrate the morning mist and it was chilly. And then I thought, how silly, to think about something so mundane at a moment like this.

Andries called, "Jambo, Jambo! Thys! Hanna!"

In an instant two figures stepped out of the cabin. Both walked erect, though at something of a forward slant. Their long arms reached to their knees. They were clearly not knuckle walkers like their gorilla mother.

Andries went forward. The shorter and more slender child ran to embrace him. I assumed it was his daughter. Although both were as naked as their father, they had enough hair covering the areas of the breasts and genitals to make positive sexual identification from my distance more a matter of robustness than certainty. Her arms went around him so far that they crossed well above the wrists. He apparently said something to her, for she turned and went to the side of the clearing where a rough set of parallel bars stood. She began to work out on these under his close

attention. She was extraordinary. No Olympic gymnast could compete with her. She performed acrobatics with one arm, and several times with two fingers, that most gymnasts would be hard-pressed to do with both hands. As she moved about so agilely, I could tell that she was a girl.

My emotions were so intense and so jumbled that I cannot recall all my thoughts, though I am being careful in describing physical details. I do remember thinking that Andries might have considered entering his daughter as part of the Belgian team in the Olympics—if she could be accepted!

As Hanna kept performing, Thys came over to watch her. He appeared to beam the way a human being would in admiring an activity. I was conscious of trying not to be too anthropomorphic. I could see both of them closer together and I looked particularly at their big toes. Did they or did they not rotate? I looked down at mine, and tried to curl my right one around a twig. Very clumsy and little rotation, though its rigidity is an obvious aid to erect posture. Hanna's big toes rotated much more, but whether as much as a gorillas' I didn't know enough to judge. My observations had not been frequent or accurate enough. But the way in which Thys stood, his big toes flat to the ground, he gave no sense of imbalance.

Both were quite hirsute, but their long brownish hair was not nearly as thick as that of gorillas. There was something about their buttocks that I can't quite describe. It was as though the gluteal muscles were still mostly oriented for walking on all fours and for supporting the pelvis of an almost erect person.

Then Andries said something to Hanna. She dropped off the parallel bars and walked over to him. Now came the most memorable single observation of that scant three-hour meeting—something Andries had told me to watch

for: Hanna smiled. It was a very human smile, a very broad smile, that seemed to convey both warmth and intelligence. Her facial muscles allowed a much larger and apparently sensitive set of facial expressions than I believe is possible for gorillas. The brown color of the children's skin made it much easier to see their facial expressions than is possible with very dark gorilla faces on an overcast day. Because black skin absorbs light, the white teeth of gorillas often appear to stand out. Certainly this was not the case with these youngsters.

Suddenly, they spotted me shaded by the trees at the edge of the clearing. They started toward me, still smiling, but hitting their chests with both hands. I felt—hoped—it was the familiar trait of gorillas to show interest and enthusiasm, not necessarily hostility. When they were about ten yards closer, and still smiling, Andries said something. They stopped and went back to a table outside the cabin where Andries was unpacking the food.

As they turned back, Hanna put her long right arm on Thys' shoulder. He turned toward his sister and I was conscious of their eye contact.

Hanna went behind the cabin and returned with an armload of wood, apparently split by an axe. She dropped the wood by a fire site with an iron grate. With a smooth, loping, gliding motion she backtracked to retrieve a single piece that had fallen. Halfway toward it she staggered a little, a characteristic I noted repeatedly in both offspring. But she quickly recovered, picked up the piece of wood, and with great accuracy threw it some twenty yards onto the pile.

As van Straeten went over to where Thys was building a fire, he glanced briefly in my direction. I couldn't tell if he was reassuring me or himself. Thys was about six feet tall, and he must have weighed almost 280 pounds. (Andries was 5'8"—almost too tall to qualify as a fighter

pilot.) Thys' upper body development was enormous by human standards. What a linebacker he would make in American football.

I would have given a great deal to be able to look carefully at their teeth and whole jaw structure. From my distance their teeth looked smaller than I have since observed in gorillas, and their canines were certainly not so prominent. The answer to a question I had often thought about was now crystal clear. These offspring were *not* animals. They *were* people.

Thys came back from the cabin with a box of matches, struck one, and set fire to the shavings Andries had cut. There are chimps who can strike matches, but Thys had greater dexterity, and another salient difference from gorillas. He returned to the cabin and brought out a cast-iron pot which he suspended from an iron rod over the fire. Using the precision grip that Andries had said to look for, Thys lighted the matches and handled the rod differently from what I would expect from a gorilla. Instead of the opposable thumb functioning by the thumb pressing against the side of first and second fingers (which means so much to advanced primates), Thys' hand operated with the thumb swinging around and opposing the center of the fingers. A great advance on gorilla technique.

It appeared that the twins did some cooking of their own. But I wondered why van Straeten had cooked the steak. As Thys put rice and meat and vegetables in the pot, I realized that cooking was one of his roles. Later, I recognized that this might be a natural modeling of the role of his father.

Thys went into the cabin again and came out with three tin plates, the kind one uses on camping expeditions. Using a large ladle quite expertly, he ladled out portions of the stew and handed them to his sister and father. They ate the meat with their fingers, tearing it apart when neces-

sary. Why was Andries doing that? Because they couldn't handle a knife and he did not want to be different? But then all three of them used large spoons to pick up the rice. Hanna was quite adept at using the spoon. She grasped it firmly with her hand over the top of it, in the more natural way that young children often use when they lack the skill, or the etiquette, to hold a spoon from below.

I'm not describing what I saw very well. Although I have thought a thousand times about almost every movement of the twins, and the scene is burned into my brain, it is hard to convey the emotional impact it had on me. My adrenalin must have been pumping at an all-time high. My thoughts then were not nearly so consecutive and rational as I am now recalling them. At one stage, and this part is a blur, I felt as though I were living two million years ago when, perhaps, gorillas and man had been separate as species a relatively short time. In my state, I would not have been surprised to see a dinosaur lumber into the clearing. It was a ridiculous thought, but I was so stupefied that I was mixing the split of man and gorillas of perhaps five million years ago with the time sixty million years ago when dinosaurs suddenly disappeared. Despite all I knew and had come to expect, my mind was all but jarred loose.

Toward dusk, van Straeten stood up, embraced both of them, then walked swiftly to my side. While we slowly dressed, he kept looking at me out of the corner of his eye. Neither of us said a word. Finally, he motioned to me and I followed him back to the cabin. So ended my first exposure to the children.

Chapter 10

Van Straeten was still asleep as I gingerly opened the bolt on the door and stepped outside, quietly closing it behind me. The low clouds on the Congo side of the range were streaked with pink and gray. The night-time birds had turned in, except for a pair of nightjars that flew low over the cabin. I was proud that I had remembered them from the somewhat boring bird lesson Andries had given me.

My thoughts, naturally enough, were on the day before. Actually, it was my first chance to contemplate what Andries had said about the difference in the size of the sexual apparatus of monogamous gorilla and promiscuous chimpanzee. Although there hadn't seemed much point to the bird "seminar," I knew there was a specific point to these sexual details. The proof that man could fertilize gorillas had been before me. I realized that it could have been by artificial insemination. Perhaps Andries was reassuring me that copulation of a human male and a female half-human would not present any physical problems.

I realized that if Andries' purpose in letting me stay at the camp was to have me sire the next generation, I was just as safe now as before I had seen his children, so long as I didn't try to leave. If he had a purpose for me, I was obviously safe until that purpose had been consummated. It both relieved me and made me tense. How soon, I wondered, would he approach the question directly? Should

I plan to escape before the day of consummation? Otherwise, my hours might be numbered. It wasn't so much that I was repelled by the thought of Hanna. But the act would be against all my personal beliefs and values, even though the scientific aspect did appeal to me. I knew that my personal safety was my chief motivation in planning my escape. Yet, I was not ready to leave.

My thought train was derailed by Andries' gruff voice calling from the cabin, "Aren't you going to have any breakfast?"

He had poured my coffee. An omelet of at least three small eggs—I guessed they were from the scrawny chickens I had seen in town—was on my plate. Andries had on his dark blue trousers and seemed dressed up compared with his (and my) usual dungaree garb, as though he were going to a funeral. After breakfast he took the walking stick that he carried for protection against poisonous snakes and motioned for me to come with him.

We didn't walk far, but it was a route we had never taken before, around behind the cabin and down the slope. I was not prepared for what I saw when he pushed through some elephant grass. Suddenly we were in a quiet vale. He dropped to his knees before a cross, hand-chiseled out of the Precambrian rock.

His emotion demanded silence. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. I was motionless for at least ten minutes. The grave was a mound, covered with grass and blue flowers—the kind that the porters on Mount Kilimanjaro had picked and woven into garlands for the successful climbers. I looked to Andries for a clue. Was this the grave of his gorilla "mate"?

Slowly, without looking at me but not trying to hide his tear-stained face, he turned down the narrow path. We walked in silence broken only by the sound of bamboo stalks rubbing against one another where they encroached

on the narrow trail. He pushed them aside. Once, I was three steps behind and one whipped back across the path and caught me across the forehead. I wanted to swear but a profanity died in my throat. A mile or so farther on, without looking back, Andries spoke obliquely: "She didn't die in childbirth. It was an accident about a year later." (He stressed the word "accident" and I wonder today what voice-stress analysis would have revealed.)

"You must have had experience with humans when a mother tries to raise babies in a different milieu from what her instincts tell her. Can you imagine how frustrating it would be if a mother put a child on her back, expecting the child to hang on, and it kept falling off. Parents of autistic children, before they know there is a defect, must suffer similar heartbreak and misery, and also blame themselves for the unexplained lack of normality."

I couldn't frame a question that would not be insensitive, so I kept quiet. Six or seven minutes later Andries began again, and only at first did it seem like a non sequitur: "You know, Nedt, gorilla babies cling instinctively. Those in evolution who couldn't or wouldn't... well, they died. I suppose that mothers who could not understand a lack of skill in their offspring probably, in some instances, finally turned on them or abandoned them. You'll admit, won't you, that a really frustrated mother might do that?"

His tone of voice told me it was a rhetorical question. There were a hundred details I was curious about, but this was not the time for an inquisition. I also felt critical of Andries. It was clear that he had removed the twins from their mother. Could he not have done more to help her deal with her half-human children? Again and again the question of how she died would haunt me.

Was he oversolicitous about the children? I felt it was sage to probe:

"What concerns you most for the physical safety of

Hanna and Thys?"

"It changes from time to time. For a while I worried most about cobras and other venomous snakes. But I taught them to look out, and one day Thys and I killed a mamba just outside their cabin.

"Now I'm most afraid of humans. There could be poachers coming through here. . . ." His voice trailed off.

Looking for meat, I thought, or to cut off gorilla hands and feet for fetishes. Sensibly, I didn't even voice this horrible possibility to Andries. Trying for the positive, I asked him:

"Andries, forgive me for commenting, but I think that Thys could defend himself very well. The way he picked up that iron bar and hit the stakes to hold the cooking pot, he looked formidable."

Then it dawned on me and I got a sick and fearful feeling. That iron bar could be what smashed the face of the Pygmy. I gave an involuntary shiver. Perspiration broke out on my forehead. With a gorilla's strength and the human ability to firmly grasp an object, Thys would be a more formidable opponent than one of either species unless a poacher had a gun.

I realized that Andries was watching me closely. I felt I had to say something or he would read my mind somehow. But I was paralyzed. Perhaps Andries himself was afraid of Thys, though I had seen no sign of it. But—my mind raced—if Andries wanted a grandson who was three-quarters human, and if he wanted him more or less his own size, then a son of Hanna and the Pygmy would be average size for *Homo sapiens*.

Had the Pygmy been involved with Hanna? Was it brotherly jealousy that led to the Pygmy's death? We had arrived back at the cabin. I started lunch while Andries played the gramophone. When we had eaten the canned ham and peas, along with the last of the once-fresh bread,

spread with rich yellow Kenya butter that Andries had brought from Kisenyi, we sat back with our cups of chai.

“What do you know about Lamarck?” Andries asked as he tamped his Rhodesian tobacco.

“Well, I guess I remember him as the man who thought that if you didn’t use a part of the anatomy, the result would be reflected in the next generation. Didn’t he try cutting off tails to see if a generation would be born without them?” Andries nodded. I went on, “And you could say that Lamarckism is what Lysenko put in modern guise to mess up Soviet agricultural research for so many years until Khrushchev stepped in.”

Andries went over to his bookcase and pulled out a small volume entitled *Hydrogeologie*. He handed it to me. The title page said “J. B. Lamarck” and the date was 1802.

Andries said, “My earliest inspiration in science was from Lamarck. It is my favorite book in French, though only a thousand copies were printed because Lamarck’s views were unpopular. He is one of the greatest men of science, not because of his wrong ideas on how evolution works, but because of his early and successful attacks on the idea of immutability of the species. One forgets today how many people believed that each species was put on earth by God and might reach extinction but did not evolve.”

“What does that have to do with...” My voice trailed off.

“Don’t rush me, Nedt, but I’ll give you an obvious example. If a human female were to be pregnant by a gorilla, I do not believe that natural birth would be possible, and the mother and child would die.”

I sat perfectly still, listening. Had he read my thoughts on the trail?

“But,” he continued, “a female gorilla could give birth to a gorilla-human child.”

My hands said, "Why the difference?"

Andries' manner was "Elementary, my dear Watson," as he explained: "As *Homo sapiens* evolved toward bipedalism, the more erect the posture, the better the men could run and hunt. But the more the females became bipedal, the more the size of the birth canal became restricted by narrowing of the pelvis. Today a human female is, so to speak, a compromise between the narrow pelvis most efficient for running and the wide pelvis that allows easier childbirth." He paused, spread his hands expressively, and went on, "I spent a summer on my uncle's farm in Friesland and I saw for myself how difficult it is for a female donkey to give birth to a half-horse offspring, whereas the mare, with a larger birth canal, handles it easily."

"How did humans survive, then, with a double inefficiency?" I asked. "Why don't we have the sexual dimorphism so common in nature?"

"I don't know why male oranges are on the average twice the size of the females; it was a possible route for human evolution to go. But *Homo sapiens* took a different route to solve the problem. You solve it by having the child less fully developed. A human child has only a fourth of his eventual brain size at birth; a gorilla's brain is three-quarters developed. But the human baby is helpless, whereas in a day the gorilla baby can by some instinct clasp its mother."

Here comes self-justification about the gorilla mother, I thought.

As he said the last words, he winced and his eyes almost glazed. I looked at him for perhaps twenty seconds, though it seemed much longer. Then he shook his head as if to clear it.

He recovered his composure and went on. "In the evolutionary process there had to be a compromise. The human baby had to be born less developed and less capable of fending for itself, or the mother would have to carry the

child to a much longer term and deliver an enormous baby for her own size. There are other possibilities. But the solution for humans was simply birth at a time when the brain was relatively developed but when the child needed nurturing for a relatively long period.”

My thoughts were racing, as they so often did with him. To make conversation, I repeated the obvious. “A smaller human birth canal would mean death for both mother and child?”

“*Exactement*,” he said, “though my conclusions in this respect came after I had decided on the philosophical need for the male to be human and Caucasian. I do not believe it is possible, barring some extraordinary physical situation—for example, a woman with a dislocated pelvis—for a human to be able to deliver a half-gorilla child, assuming that there was conception. This is the best refutation to all the canards about African women and apes.”

Then, staring straight ahead into the darkness, van Straeten said with studied casualness, “That is why a human being involved in such an experiment should not be an African and could not be a woman.”

The myriad sounds of the forest increased in the silence that followed. Then van Straeten, at first hesitantly but with growing enthusiasm, encouraged by my friendly interest and lack of censure, went on. “As I told you, I wouldn’t be surprised if there has already been the mechanical transfer of spermatozoa. But that really requires laboratory conditions.”

“Are the mechanics of inter-primate intercourse physically difficult?” I asked.

“No.” He was emphatic. “It requires a lot of trying, because gorilla fertility is low to begin with and fertility between species, as we’ve discussed, is less common than within either one. So it can take a long time. The female gorilla,” he went on, sounding too clinical for my

taste, "must be habituated and even slightly drugged so that you can take her temperature and come close to the right moment for ovulation."

I was immediately reminded of the day I had seen a large syringe on Andries' table. It looked like what I had seen used to give medicine to horses, Andries had used it as a kitchen utensil for basting. I began to speculate that he might not have actually had intercourse with the mother. Perhaps, during the socializing, she had been drugged and he had preceded with artificial insemination. If true, that would answer a lot of questions in my mind.

I had to force myself to concentrate on what Andries was trying to convey. First, the human in any primate cross could not be female for physiological reasons. Second, van Straeten's own convictions on matters of race ruled out an African. A successful cross between an African male and a female gorilla would serve only as ammunition for racists around the world who blatantly or subconsciously wanted to go back to the myths of the nineteenth century and view black people as some lower species. That had left him as the only possible father here in the Ruwenzori.

The conversation was elliptical. We were now talking in the few moments between games of trictrac, and I found it terribly difficult to concentrate on the play at the same time I was rolling around a half-formed idea that Andries had introduced and then dropped as we cast our single dice to start the game.

All the talk about reproduction further underlined my conviction that he had a role for me. I suddenly realized that I had been making a big mistake. My life would not be endangered after copulation with Hanna. The danger would come only when Andries was certain that she was pregnant. I had wondered if I could perform the act once for scientific reasons. But now, with the realization that Hanna's fertility was probably low, a vision of repeated

efforts began to string out ahead of me, and I was physically repulsed. Not very clinical, I thought to myself. But distaste gave way to fear as I contemplated how a continuing relationship with Hanna would be perceived by Thys. The vision of the Pygmy's lacerated and almost crushed skull floated before my eyes. Also, Thys picking up that bar outside the cabin. The two images dissolved into one. Would Thys be jealous as an animal or as a brother or both? I gave a sigh but Andries was concentrating on the trictrac and didn't notice. Now I would have two people who might have good reason to kill me—one after Hanna was pregnant, and the other even before then. What kind of a spot had I put myself in? The urge to escape rushed through me as I gave an involuntary shiver.

* * *

I told Andries that I was going for a walk up the mountain. Instead, I circled back and walked three hours to a dirt road where I caught a ride from a passing truck. I had taken my passport and what money I had. No doubt when I didn't return that evening, Andries would check and know that I had left. Would he be afraid that I might reveal his secret—if it really was a secret? Would he come after me? I thought not. The plane from Stanleyville—as I still called it—to Kinshasha was hot and the spraying for mosquitos unpleasant. Johannesburg had lost its attraction. I wanted out of Africa. Soon I was on a Sabena 707 to Brussels and, in another day, back in California.

Chapter 11

To understand van Straeten and what he was all about, and to recognize why he was such a prescient pioneer, one must understand a few of the recent discoveries in his field of experimentation. The following letter, which I wrote to van Straeten is germane.

December 14, 1978
M. Andries van Straeten
Poste Restante
Kisenyi
République du Rwanda, Africa

Beste Andries:

Your letter was most welcome, though I am concerned at what your move may entail. You are always welcome here in Pasadena. That you know. Conditions do sound ominous. We never thought that by 1978 so much of the infrastructure of Zaire, especially transport, would be in worse condition than it was in the colonial Congo. It seemed such an adventure when I took that 2,400-mile trip on the Congo from Banana to Matadi, by rail to Leo, by riverboat to Coq and Stan, the little rail station in Kindu I remember so well, and finally by the last river boat

that let me off at Bukama. I understand that the boats still running are like steerage. You can't buy cabin space because it doesn't exist, the bathrooms don't function, and all the pleasures of travel have gone. Did you ever know Captain Thuysen? When we saw a herd of elephants round a bend, he reduced speed and tied up at the shore so that we could approach them cautiously along the bank.

I take it that the Kisenyi address will be correct until I hear otherwise. There is a lot to say. I so wish you would consider making a university seminar tour when and if the time is propitious. Your comment on our friends' illness does worry me. You hadn't mentioned anyone being sick before, and I know how careful you have always been to try to avoid it. Andries, I'm sending you some journals and books by sea mail. So much has been happening that confirms your brilliant interpretations and predictions. Is it really so long since I've seen you?

The results of the Wenner-Gren Foundation conference at their castle in Austria in August 1975 have been published. The conference was on molecular anthropology. You'll understand the chemistry and biology much better than I do.

Can you believe the following theory put forward in Austria by Morris Goodman of the Department of Anatomy at Wayne State University in Detroit? He says, "The family Hominidae is redefined to include members of the Pongidae as well as man. The traditional Pongidae as the family of the great apes is eliminated. Instead, Hominidae divides into subfamilies Pongi-

dae for Pongo and Homininae for Pan, Homo, and Gorilla. In general, the molecular data do not clearly show which two of these three Homines share the most recent common ancestor."

Goodman is a seminal thinker in his field and one of the editors of the Wenner-Gren conference.

Andries, you must know it, but I hadn't realized that in scientific parlance Pongo is the Orangutan and Pan is the immediate ancestor of the Chimpanzee. You always said that oranges should be in one subfamily, humans and gorillas in another, and chimps in a third.

Another paper from this August 1975 conference has now been revised and will not surprise you. It is by Vogel, Kopun, and Rathenberg, who are at the Anthropology Institute in Heidelberg. You may know something of their earlier work. In the present paper they compare the structural differences in how human chromosomes and gorilla and chimp chromosomes are arranged, and find that there are almost unexplainable contradictions in the relationships suggested between man and what they call "the great apes." The one solution they discuss but are reluctant to accept is that well after separation of gorilla and chimpanzee "there was a period (or periods) of hybridization with Gorilla which led to a sharing of 5, 12, and 17 (and possibly 4)." The numbers refer to the specific chromosome rearrangements that became homozygous.

Andries, do not worry. You can trust me. But someday you must publish or at least give some seminars about your own knowledge in this connection. The authors dislike the recombining

explanation, as they made clear in these words: "This hypothesis, of course, implies a new principle not contained in the usual thinking on speciation, which always implies establishment of a reproductive barrier." I've sent you the proceedings. You should have them—unless the book is ripped off in the Kinshasha post office—by next March. It has a good subtitle: "Genes and Proteins in the Evolutionary Ascent of the Primates."

Another small item of interest to you is from the work of Professor Richard Dickerson. It involves the amino acid sequences of the electron carrier cytochrome c. You probably know that this last is a complex protein about one hundred amino acids long. Its mutation rate is well known. Dickerson had constructed an evolutionary tree by comparing these cytochrome c substitutions in different species. "*Between humans and gorillas there are no changes,*" he told me on the phone. Yesterday, after playing tennis with my colleague Harry Gray, a brilliant chemist, I asked him about this, and he explained that it means that electrons would be passed along in the mitochondria of the gorilla at *exactly the same rate* as in humans. Between humans and chimps there is one change in the amino acid sequence. Between humans and kangaroos there are six substitutions, and so on. Harry did caution me that the difference between none and one may not be statistically meaningful. But I can see you smile and nod your head at the same time.

Dickerson has written about his findings in *The Journal of Molecular Biology* this year, and he did an article in a semi-popular vein for *Sci-*

entific American, back in April 1972, but neither paper discusses the gorilla specifically.

One more item I must summarize in this letter, though now that I am sure where you are, I'll get you a copy of the whole article from the April 11, 1975 issue of *Science*. It is only nine pages, but it confirms your predictions as I understood them. The authors, Mary-Claire King and A. C. Wilson, confirm that the polypeptides average 99 percent identical to man, gorilla and chimp, but also that between man and chimps (and presumably gorillas) the genetic difference based on "electrophoretic comparison of proteins encoded by 44 loci is very small, corresponding to the genetic distance between sibling species of fruit flies or mammals." They conclude that a relatively small number of genes may account for the major differences in appearance.

Andries, in the articles I'm sending you will notice that the view is gaining currency that the extraordinary closeness of gorilla and man from a molecular point of view can be attributed to a remarkable slowdown in the rate of molecular change in all advanced primates. Without such a slowdown, hybridization long time periods later would not have been possible between gorilla and chimp.

I must close, but with so many questions still poised on the tips of my typing fingers. My warmest affection to you in this season of good tidings. Hearing from you was "good tidings"!

'n Gelukkige Kersmis,
(Signed)
Ned

Van Straeten did not reply as twelve months went by, even though I sent a copy after six months. There could be a lot of reasons. The postal service had deteriorated badly from colonial days. Packages that looked to contain anything valuable would almost never make it, even to Kinshasha. My second letter was deliberately put in a scruffy brown envelope. But then it could have been picked up and van Straeten was just being moody in not responding.

As Christmas approached, I wrote another letter with sensational news for him as follows:

November 19, 1979

M. Andries van Straeten
Poste Restante
Kisenyi
République du Rwanda, Africa

Beste Andries:

If you have not yet heard the news of the Georgia births, you will feel well vindicated. Scientists by the names of Myers and Shafer have published a paper in *Science* reporting the live births of two offspring from a male gibbon and a female simiang. THIS IS THE FIRST REPORTED VIABLE HYBRID OF APES IN ALL HISTORY. I do wish you had published, but perhaps you will now.

What is so extraordinary, as you will probably realize immediately, is that the chromosome count is so different. The hybrid karyotype of 47 chromosomes is drawn 22 from the gibbon and 25 from the simiang.

When you consider that simiangs are twice the weight of gibbons of the same sex, and that

their vocalization is quite different, they have clearly been differentiated for some fifteen million years. This despite the fact that their amino acids are almost identical.

The authors state—quite boldly, I think, in view of the persistence of a hard core religious anti-Darwinism in Georgia (and even here in California)—that “in terms of chromosome structure, there exists a greater genetic distance between these lesser apes than that which distinguishes the great apes from one another *and from man.*”

I have also heard further unconfirmed rumors that a chimpanzee female has been fertilized with human sperm and deliberately aborted at four months. The political brouhaha that would arise from news of a viable ape-human offspring could threaten the careers of the scientists concerned and even their institution.

Dear Andries, you **MUST** publish. It is in many ways the greatest and most unexpected development in genetics since Gregor Mendel and rivals the development of nuclear fission in physics.

I understand your feelings about our friends. But they could be protected. To think that one man could conceive (figuratively and literally) such a tremendous advance in genetics is unknown in present day science.

Cordially,

Ned

As the years passed I wrote to Andries at times and enclosed items that I thought might interest him. I knew he would enjoy the story passed on to me by an Afrikaans newspaper editor, who had met George Bernard Shaw in Cape Town. He asked the British author for his opinion of Afrikaners. Shaw replied that he had only been to Durban and hadn't seen Afrikaners but that the Zulus were a fine specimen of a race. My editor friend explained that very few Afrikaners lived in Cape Town so what did Shaw think of Afrikaners in the Cape?

"Tall and with superb physiques," Shaw replied, "Why don't your women intermarry with the Zulus and create the most magnificent species in Africa?" I had told the story to Alan Paton, who just leaned back in his chair and roared in his crusty way.

Another story I passed on had been found by one of my research assistants—Charlene Baldwin or Judy Nollar—were the stories about Babe Ruth being partly black. It was the era of Johnson, the heavyweight boxing champion who was derided for his physical skills as indicating his closeness to apes.

In the 1922 World Series Babe Ruth was constantly needled by the New York Giant bench as "niggerlips" and "the baboon." Something of the home run king's reaction to these epithets was revealed when the orphan stormed into the Giant clubhouse and warned his tormentors not to call him "nigger" anymore: "Don't get me wrong fellows, I don't mind being called" and he mentioned the worst sexual obscenities "or things like that. But lay off the personal stuff."

Going back to many of our discussions in the cabin of how the discovery of West Africa and of chimpanzees and gorillas led to scurrilous identification of black Africans with gorillas, I passed on a true story from the Bronx Zoo exhibit of 1906. Crowds of New Yorkers were drawn to

a cage that contained an orangutan and a Pygmy from Africa. There are suggestions that some zoologist wanted to make the point that human beings and great apes are not so far apart. But as I wrote to Andries, they could have put a naked Caucasian American in the cage to make the point.

Van Straeten had replied that I was being naive. The exhibit was, he asserted and probably correctly, to suggest there is a range of "advanced development" and that the Pygmy was a step beyond the orang. It pleased me to tell him that the morally repugnant exhibit, which didn't last long, was closed because the Pygmy would take the bow and arrow he had been given and shoot arrows at the spectators who were making sport of him. The Pygmy's name was Ota Benga; he proved his humanness by forcing the exhibition to close. The zoo officials let him out of the cage and he moved to Virginia where he committed suicide. I also told Andries that this was a very human reaction to such degradation and racism. But it make me think, once again, of what would happen to Hanna and Thys even in the supposedly more enlightened final quarter of the 20th century.

Van Straeten's replies to my notes were curt but not hostile. There was no hint of anger over my precipitous and unannounced departure. No indication—but why would he give one—if there would be any danger to me at the cabin. Was it just my imagination that foresaw a plan for me to father a three-quarter human-gorilla cross? I began to think so.

* * *

Later on I went to South Africa to the bi-annual meeting of the board of the U.S.-South African Leader Program. I had been a founder of this bi-national and multi-racial organization in 1958. It worked hard to bring an end to apartheid by the exchange of leaders from the two

societies. The South African government had long refused multi-racial meetings in South Africa. But now they were possible. On the occasion of that visit I spent some time with Willem de Klerk, an Afrikaans newspaper editor. He was liberally minded on race. Much more so than his eight-years-younger brother W. A. de Klerk, or their father, an old reprobate who had been kicked out of his teaching job for molesting a girl, and then from the South African cabinet for *verneukery* (cheating) on his ministry.

In the duller moments of the meetings, and when I might awake during the night and listen to the waves of the Indian Ocean, my mind would travel straight north. North to Rwanda and “the children.” I had thought my time with Andries was over but our occasional letters acted as a literary umbilical cord. Suddenly during a walk on the beach—actually the beach where the movie “The Perfect Wave” was made—I came to the decision to go back. Fear of van Straeten vanished. The cause was too demanding.

The following week I flew out of Jan Smuts airport to Nairobi, and went to stay with the Leakeys.

I had to wait several days for the once a week Sabena flight to Kigali. My admiration for Louis and Mary never ceased. One had to realize that Louis was the dreamer and Mary a far more serious scientist.

She was once asked about their professional relationship. Rather delicately, but emphatically, she pointed out that to get private support from individuals and foundation grants it helped to be flamboyant. Louis sparked with ideas. Those who were “splitters” when it came to new species always attracted more attention than the “lumpers.” And then, Mary continued, it takes months of patient digging in the field to make the actual discoveries. Without implying it was a put down, Mary went on to say how well she and Louis worked together as a team.

As president of the Leakey Foundation I first had to convince Louis that the foundation was named for him but that it was critical that he *not* be the decision maker. We had a board of scientists for that. Still. I was surprised during my visit when Mary asked, quite tentatively, if the foundation might find the \$15,000 or so dollars for a new truck. She was both a bit surprised as well as delighted when the truck arrived in Dar es Salaam for her to pick up.

She does not have much interest in primatology for a variety of reasons. After Louis had died and Richard Leakey, a strong personality in his own right, wanted to take over the funds of the Leakey Foundation he ridiculed his father's knowledge of primatology, pointing out to me that his father had never published a single paper in the field. Despite her lack of enthusiasm for primatology, Mary Leakey backed me in the dispute with her son because she honored Louis' vision in stimulating work among gorillas, chimpanzees, and orangutans.

The last evening, Louis demonstrated cats cradle or string figures. The Leakeys had invited in some Nairobi friends. Louis had us rolling with laughter about the experiences he and Mary had in Angola. The high Portuguese administrator said the local "natives" knew nothing about string figures. As a habit, Louis had taken out a piece of string and began doing some highly secret (juju) string figures. As the waiter carrying the platter of dinner meat came through the kitchen door, he saw Louis doing a string figure, dropped the platter with a loud crash, and fled from the compound. We couldn't stop laughing as Louis described the choleric confoundment of the Portuguese colonialist. The evening struck in my mind and years later I was to publish the Leakey string story with an introduction by Mary.

The next day, Louis, always accommodating, drove me to the airport, never stopping his commentary on the wild animals we saw passing through Nairobi National Park en route.

* * *

In Kigali, I was able to rent a Peugeot and made the cabin that night. Time warps distance. It would be too much of a cliché to say that nothing had changed. Andries was nonplussed rather than pleased or hostile. When I went into the cabin I looked for signs of the children and there were none. From jet lag and the excitement, I was tired. Half a bottle of the Stellenbosch wine I had brought for Andries was enough to put me to sleep.

We didn't talk much at breakfast. Perhaps he was feeling me out. This time I knew that Andries' taciturnity was not necessarily personal. It seemed a bit early but soon after we had finished a second cup of coffee, he got out the trictrac board. I remember that he had sometimes used it as a way of working into conversation. The burning question for me now that I had seen the children was language. On my previous visit I had overheard Andries speaking to them in Kiswahili. While they were together, I had seen their lips moving. But I didn't hear any words or form an opinion as to their vocabulary. What had been clearly evident were the human-like facial expressions. That seemed a good place to start the conversation.

"Hanna and Thys have markedly human expressions, don't they?" My voice trailed as though I were nervous about broaching the question.

Andries brushed away the query with an impatient movement of his hand. Actually, it kind of stopped and fluttered the way his eyes did. "You know, Nedt, the most influential books are often not read. I paused before replying. "You mean that often a book's influence extends far beyond its readership?"

He nodded in agreement.

I continued, “you once complimented me on not being an ‘ugly American.’” At first you puzzled me because the hero of the Burdick book *was* the *Ugly American* of the title. I’ve heard or read the expression a hundred times and never in the right context.” Andries came back to my question about his offspring’s expressions and asked: “Have you read the books?” His head tilted to the shelves of books that lined the back wall of the cabin.

“Well, which ones?” I asked.

He walked over to the books, taking one out: “Here, read Darwin’s *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*. It was published...” he turned to the title page, “in 1872.” He pulled out another volume from his remarkable library.

“Here is the Moreau edition of Lavater on physiology that was first published in 1807 and that discusses the act of frowning.” He waved generally towards the books.

“You’ll find Burgess on *Blushing* about 1840 and Spencer’s essay on the physiology of laughter written about thirty years later.”

Enough of this endless erudition. A thought suddenly struck me. Could the twins make their hair bristle when they were angry? “Andries,” I asked with a laugh, “can you wiggle your ears?” I began to wiggle mine vigorously.

“Well, Nedt, maybe you are more gorilla than you know. No, I cannot wiggle my ears. But Thys can make his hair stand on end when he is angry with me. You’ll find that discussed in the Darwin book where he talks about bristling in primates.”

Andries left it at that. He picked up the backgammon dice, rolled a 6-1, and made his move. I took the hint. But I couldn’t stop thinking. Nothing he had said gave me a clue as to the future. I did feel physically safe. But then, if he had encouraged me to stay in order to father a three-

quarters-human child, I would be safe at least until I had fulfilled my role.

I had realized that all of Andries' earlier talk about the size of testes, the amount of ejaculate, and the mating strategy were to make it clear that man could fertilize a gorilla without using artificial insemination.

In the trictrac, Andries trounced me easily, not so much because he got better rolls of the dice, but because I made stupid plays. Later, after dinner, as he made signs of going to bed, I couldn't resist commenting: "The last time I was here, I couldn't understand much of what you were saying to the children. The wind was rustling the trees too much. How well do your children speak now?"

He shook his head sadly and his shoulders dropped. "That is my greatest disappointment, if I have any, with my children. Their vocabulary is perhaps three thousand words. I suppose a six- or seven-year old Belgian child has about that many. But neither of my children has a seven-year-old's ability to structure speech. The problem is not vocabulary but grammar and syntax."

"Why do you think that is so?"

"Well, I knew before I began this effort that in gorillas and chimpanzees the sounds of speech are controlled by parts of the brain that are old in an evolutionary sense. The human cortex has an enormous flexibility that makes structured speech possible. I had hoped that a half-human species would share some of that cortical adaptability. An individual who was three-fourths human would be certain to have the critical cortical quality."

I ignored the reference and put another question, somewhat hesitantly for fear of hurting his feelings. "Is it possible," I began, "that your children, wonderful as they are as your offspring, are not, well, not mentally acute?"

"Do you mean mentally retarded?" he asked, looking directly at me.

“That would be a possibility, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes,” he replied, “that could happen easily. In fact, there might be a genetic reason for half of all human-gorilla children to be mentally retarded. We obviously can’t know. One of the largest primate laboratories in your country—I’m thinking of Yerkes somewhere in Georgia—apparently first tested a mentally retarded gorilla without knowing it and set standards that are abnormally low. But I do know, and perhaps you were close enough to observe, that neither one of them is a Mongoloid. I have seen Mongoloid humans and chimps. The Downs syndrome is clearly indicated by the eyefold. Neither Thys nor Hanna shows any signs of that.”

“But why,” again my voice was tentative as one would be in calling attention to a friend’s physical defect, “do both Thys and Hanna stagger every once in a while and seem to lose their equilibrium?”

“I thought you’d notice that.” His tone showed no irritation. “I did think it might be an indication of a neurological disease. But I’m sure it arises from the fact that their posture is much more erect than that of their mother. The reorientation of the semicircular canals so important to equilibrium in all primates doesn’t quite match the way they stand. They often fell as children and now it is only an occasional stagger. In the long genetic run, any serious lack of equilibrium would be selected out.”

I felt pleased that I could now add something. “I feel that the old idea of homo developing more or less uniformly is false. When we find three million year old skeletons they will be clearly fully bipedal, but their crania and dentition quite primitive. Full bipedalism developed long before the expansion of the brain capacity.”

While waiting for Andries to speak, I imagined myself asking specifically about the adjustment of a half-human, half-gorilla child to being fully upright. This condition

must have taken a great deal of adjustment for our ancestors. The fact that they evolved from walking on all fours without going through a knuckle-walking stage fits into this thesis of early bipedalism.”

[Now, in 1995, I know that the understanding of the evolution of bipedalism was greatly advanced by Don Johanson’s discoveries in the Hadar region of Ethiopia. When I was president of the Leakey Foundation, I received a telegram from Johanson in Addis Ababa. He felt he was on the verge of a major discovery but desperately needed \$10,000 to carry on right away and before the next rainy season might destroy the few bones he had seen and the many more he suspected he could find. Don was far from the later eminence in the field that his Lucy discoveries would gain for him. It was a gamble and I’ll always be proud of my small role in finding the funds and cabling them to him.

Still later confirmation of my speculations on bipedalism were Dr. Mary Leakey’s discoveries of the Laetoli footprints in Tanzania. I was privileged to be taken to the site by Mary, although it was carefully covered over with dirt until a protective structure could be built. It is a twist of history that Don Johanson later uncovered the Laetoli footprints and made casts. Mary was “disgusted” and told me bitterly that Don had been unscientific in his work and had ruined the earliest footprints ever preserved of human beings.]

“Why,” I asked, feeling less hesitant in putting direct questions, “did I get such a strong gorilla odor from you when you came back from seeing Hanna and Thys? Even without clothes to absorb the odor, you had picked it up from hugging your children. Now I remember how you regularly took a dip in the stream after a visit, or at least you often came back with wet hair.”

"I'm glad, my friend, that you do not hesitate to ask. I only did that because I didn't want you to pick up the smell. After the first week or so, when I knew you must know something but that I could trust you, I took a dip only if there were time."

"Andries, since you don't mind my questions, why does Hanna have a more human face, and Thys a more human body?"

"Nedt, the difference is slight, but seeing them for the first time, you were overimpressed. It is true, because I have measured it: Hanna's face is closer to being perpendicular. It is almost 90 percent up and down compared with about 65 percent in gorillas and almost 120 percent in humans. Thys' stronger chin makes the angle look less human, but it is within two percent of Hanna's. The humanness of Thys' body is, I think, almost all a question of hair. To you a male human can have a lot of hair and still be human. But a female with as much hair as Hanna has does not look human. The smaller breasts inherited from her mother (although we Flemish run to large bosoms), plus being obscured by hair, just don't make her look as human."

As Andries was talking it struck me how much more relaxed he had become. It was almost as though he had come out of the closet as homosexuals do. They often can't believe that some of their closest friends have tumbled to their sexual orientation, and the moment of revelation is filled with fear. I suppose Andries had been right to have such apprehension. Before I saw the children, I couldn't have been positive in my own mind whether I would easily accept them, or be appalled. Now Andries must be wondering about my attitude towards siring the next generation.

Meanwhile, he had gone outside to relieve himself. When he came back, his head had again been going, as they say,

twenty to the dozen, and he launched another intellectual attack on me.

“Nedt, I really think that scientists have not concentrated enough on the relationship between bipedalism and speech.”

“Say that again.”

“Until you have full bipedalism in primates you obviously don’t have your hands free. And there is something about the ability to use your hands freely that helps the tongue to move. Thys just doesn’t have ways of using his tongue the way we do.”

“But Andries, surely a tongue could learn to move without hands?”

“Of course it could. But I think tongue and hand movements did develop together. For instance, when my grandmother used to thread a needle, she always stuck out her tongue.”

“My mother did the same thing.”

“And Nedt, are we not being too simplistic in saying that a gorilla can be bipedal just because he can walk upright? Think of all the gorillas I’ve shown you. How many walked any way but in a single gait? They run, but they walk in only one way.”

“What do you mean, gait?”

“Well, we’ve never seen a gorilla skip. They don’t really hop, though monkeys may. Gorillas don’t lope or jump, either. They seem just to have the two modes of movement, walking and running.”

“You’re right. That is why Hanna seems so much more like us. She has a variety in her walk, and being always bipedal she is more like you than like her mother must have been.

“I know it’s hard to judge, but I’ve learned never to underrate your talents, so I wonder what you think of their cranial capacities?”

“Yes, I do have thoughts on this. But you know that the correlation between cranial capacity in human races and their intelligence is not a strong one; nor is it a good indicator within an ethnic group. Very, very few Frenchmen have as small a brain size as Anatole France, who was my father’s favorite French author. But I would judge that both children have reached the limit of their cranial capacity, and it is about 1,000 cubic centimeters. That is about 25 percent more than a gorilla’s but within 20 percent of members of the now-extinct human race that inhabited Tasmania. Of course a . . .” He didn’t have to say three-quarters to me.

Feeling much more confident in speaking now that I had seen his children, I asked, “What you say raises a question that has puzzled me. I know that in Downs disease there is an extra chromosome, making 49. But so far as gorillas and humans are concerned, the difference is between 46 and 48 chromosomes. Couldn’t a lot of things go wrong genetically? Wouldn’t you have many stillbirths? And in viable births might there not be a high percentage of birth defects such as mental retardation?”

It was good to be able to speak with some freedom.

“Of course,” he shook his head wearily. “These were not my first gorilla children. They are the only viable ones. I just don’t know how many births would be necessary to produce a child without some major defect. Perhaps, in this new species, to be normal is abnormal. But then there is no basis of knowing what would happen if ‘healthy’ offspring were to reproduce with each other.”

I didn’t want to be harsh, but I had to get something out. “You mean that the mother of your children actually lived nearby and produced stillborn children? Why did she die?”

I had gone too far and regretted it.

Van Straeten's face was flushed and he gave me a withering look. "Is that what you think of me after all this time?"

I stammered to get out a reply. "No, I didn't mean it that way. I know it sounded terrible. But even though you did cry that day by her grave, you have never spoken with affection for the mother of apparently a number of children, both living and dead. Your humanity and your expressed views toward women just don't seem to go together with your attitude toward the mother."

He was both angry and anguished. We were standing now, face to face over the trictrac table, and his eyelids fluttered so rapidly that I thought he might be having a stroke.

"Nedt, I hated myself in those days. You have no idea how my appearance, my bad luck, made me hate the company of another person—another primate, I should say. I've accepted you and it has been good to have you here. But when my children were born, I was not the same person I am today. However, I didn't contribute to her death. I did provide food. But I did not want the children to associate with any primate until they began to grow up."

"WHY?" My voice was too loud and too insistent. It seemed to offend the natural tone of the forest, if not Andries.

"Well, there are medical reasons. As you must know, higher primates share a lot of diseases such as colds, arthritis, and tuberculosis. There are diseases specific to gorillas, although we don't know much about them. Gorillas have their own parasites, for example.

"With my children we are dealing with *terra incognita*. I have no idea what antibodies they may have. Do they have protection against specifically gorilla diseases? What about human diseases that no gorilla has ever had? Are they susceptible there? Obviously, I cannot know. But I

had the option of keeping them away from gorillas.

“Of course, Nedt, there is the social side. I do want their nurture to be as relatively human as possible. I’m taking a chance with you. But I’ve thought about it. Otherwise you wouldn’t have been in the cabin three days.”

The “three days” was slightly ominous. Would I have been asked to leave all in one piece? The Belgian’s manner-of-factness left no crevices for me to explore for an explanation.

I sought to change the subject. The first topic that popped into my head was one that had puzzled me as I stood naked, watching the family threesome. “Why is it, Andries, that you have apparently insisted on nudity? Some observers might think you were not encouraging the ‘human’ side.”

“I know what you mean. We have all seen monkeys dressed up in human clothes and made to look ‘cute.’ Since I was creating, in a sense, a new society here on the mountain, I looked at a lot of Western values. The Judeo-Christian approach has been to use nakedness as a symbol of sin. Europeans have long seen nudity in other cultures as a sign of heathen, or inferior, quality. Christians have taught sin to the Tahitians, to the Balinese, and to many African peoples.”

Andries was, I knew, fundamentally an atheist or an agnostic, but I had not grasped the bitterness he appeared to hold.

“Why should I,” he went on, “teach my children that their bodies are evil? Would the world judge them to be more intelligent if Thys wore a tuxedo and Hanna a ball-gown?”

“Do you know much about the Nuer?” I asked.

“Ja, I’ve read Evans Pritchard.”

“Well, you should also read Beidelman. He has used Pritchard’s material and gone far beyond it in studying

Nuer nakedness and nudity.”

“They are related to the Dinka, aren’t they?”

“Yes, but they live farther to the west in the Sudan, and they are far less influenced by Europeans. Of course, times do change. When I first visited the Upper Nile in 1949, Dinka males would walk into the drug store—I mean chemist’s—without a stitch on and ask for a comb. An old journalist friend of my father’s from *Chicago Daily News* days, Negley Farson, begins his book, *The Last Chance in Africa*, as he lands at an airport in the southern Sudan where the descending travelers found a crowd of naked Dinkas. If I remember the expression, he said that a ‘gorgeous display of swinging manhood’ startled some of the women passengers. But then he goes on from that symbolism to a lot of racist garbage about the black man’s ‘breeding propensities.’”

Anger at the memory made my voice rise. My friend asked dryly, “But weren’t you telling me about the Nuer?”

“Yes, sorry. The Nuer use clothes and adornment so differently from Europeans. Sometimes clothes are worn to keep warm and dry. Sometimes clothes or ornaments are worn to indicate social status. For example, a waistcord that does not cover the genitals is solely a badge of status.

“On the other hand, if I recall, the Nuer must be totally nude during the transition from one state to another; that is, the steps into adulthood, marriage, and death.”

“Nedt, maybe I’m more Nuer than I thought,” he said with a tired smile. “They aren’t that far away. Maybe 800 kilometers? But it seems thousands from here. Anyway, I’ve always taught the children to wear clothes when they need them—like the Nuer—for warmth and to keep dry. I do worry about their having less hair than gorillas to protect them when we have cold nights. But they have blankets in the cabin. It may be healthy not to wear clothes at other times. And never have I taught them to be prudish

about themselves or with me. That is why I asked you to strip while you watched. It was the 'normal' state for them to meet another man like me."

I thought that perhaps he had preferred no clothes so as to leave them as much like their mother. After all you couldn't put clothes on her, so I asked, "But couldn't their mother live with them like that?"

His face darkened. He didn't look at me but turned abruptly, opened the door, and went out, half-slamming it behind him. I had again touched a nerve.

Chapter 12

The following morning I had lightly read in half a dozen books from the library shelves, waiting for some sound from Andries. I went over in my mind the extraordinary events of the days before I had left and my own reactions to them. I felt less concerned about Andries, but the vision of Thys with the iron bar and the crushed skull of the Pygmy from the Ituri Forest continued to haunt me.

Finally, noting that it was already 11:00, a time past which Andries had never slept, I went into the main room, half expecting that he had gotten up much earlier and gone out.

In fact, he was in bed and seemed drowsy.

“How are you?” I asked solicitously.

“Mal,” was his succinct answer. Then he amplified it in his accented English, “I’ve got a cold, or at least a fever. I was in the rain too long the other day.”

As he got up, he brushed away my words of sympathy. His usually silver hair was a dull pewter, as though he had been sick longer than overnight. As I made the coffee, he came to the point:

“You’ll have to take food to the children. Yesterday I forgot the rice and the salt and the boiled ham I promised Hanna I would bring.” His head cocked characteristically as he asked,

“You don’t mind?”

Of course I didn't mind. I had had no clues as to how often I might see the children, let alone how soon I might actually talk with them. Perhaps Andries' fever had accelerated his timetable. He must have a timetable, given his whole approach.

"Of course, Andries, I can go out after breakfast if you want me to."

An hour later I set off down the path with the provisions, to which Andries had added two chocolate bars, saying,

"Tell them they are a gift from you."

After I passed through the dense clump of lobelias, I spotted some wild celery. I knew that gorillas love to eat wild celery. As I picked some, I wondered if I were violating some principle that Andries had established, such as only feeding his children on "European food." Funny how the word "European" seemed appropriate. I guess because I had spent so much time in colonial Africa where distinctions were drawn between food eaten by the white colonialists and that given to African servants. At Makerere University, I had been roundly criticized when I bought so called "European meat" for my cook Festo, and not the expected lower quality beef called, degradingly, "boys" meat.

As I gathered the wild celery, I frightened an olive pigeon. It flew directly over me so that I could see its white-speckled chest and bright yellow bill. The loud flapping of its wings made me jump, and I realized that I was still unusually tense. Its loud call, which sounded almost like a braying donkey, was also disconcerting.

But my anticipation was high. I was excited as I undressed at the spot Andries had shown me. As I walked forward toward the children's cabin, carrying the food Andries had given me plus the wild celery, I kept calling, "Jambo, Jambo," so as not to alarm the children.

Hanna came out alone. She answered my greeting and asked, "Havari?" (How are you?). She seemed neither

agitated nor frightened. Perhaps Andries had explained a lot about me.

“Wapi Thys?” I asked. She explained that he had gone for a walk in the forest. This surprised me because I thought that Andries kept the children fairly close to their cabin. But there was obviously a lot going on that I didn’t know.

Hanna smiled her very human smile. She looked happy. She smiled again and I could see traces of tears in her large brown eyes. It was so human, it was uncanny. In a flash, I thought of Darwin’s speculation on the purposes of tears, and of how astounded he would be if he were in my shoes. The thought of shoes brought me back to reality. My right foot was hurting from having walked barefooted even a short way in the forest. I lifted it up and pulled out a splinter.

Hanna looked sympathetic, or so I thought. Smiling again, she put her right arm around me. It went all the way around my shoulder until it almost touched her side. We turned and walked to the cabin. To make it easier to walk, her arm dropped down until it was on top of my buttocks. I was conscious that it was not a sexual gesture. She seemed so natural.

Inside the cabin, which had windows but no glass, were three chairs and a rough-hewn table. As I put the cloth bag down on the table, Hanna’s arm fell away from me. There was something sensuous about the way the soft hair on her arm moved across my back.

I took out the wild celery and put it on the table. Surprisingly, she just looked at it. Pulling back a chair, I sat down and began to eat a stalk. She observed me closely, and sitting down herself, she took a stalk and began eating. Whether she had an inherited taste for wild celery I cannot know, but she obviously liked it and made a licking sound with her lips. I noticed how relatively small her

tongue was compared with a gorilla's. Of course, I was always conscious of her being half-gorilla when I looked at her body. She weighed about 220 pounds and was muscular. Her hug had been rather tight and had almost made me wince.

We got onto the subject of Andries for some minutes. I find it difficult to summarize. Her vocabulary tended to consist of nouns. Her Swahili pronunciation was certainly as good as mine, though I noticed a French intonation. However, there was not much depth to what she said. I mean that she didn't seem to take fact one and fact two and make a deduction. But her physical expression was animated and she was quick. She knew of Belgium as a far-away country. At one moment I caught her looking at my eyelids. Clearly, she noticed how abnormal I must look compared with Andries. That is to say, she had every reason to assume that all humans had flickering eyelids. I explained in simple words that long ago her father had had an accident. When I said that he was riding a "ndege" (using the Swahili word for bird), and that he had fallen down, I made a swooping motion with my hand and crashed it on top of the table. She suddenly looked panic-stricken, the way a young child does when you tell it a fairy tale in which something horrible happens.

All this time I made a conscious effort not to talk down to her, and not to treat her as a child. In truth, she did not seem like a child. It was as if I were speaking to someone in a language I barely knew, such as Russian. I would use nouns and proper names and thus for example, would call a woman by the masculine version without adding the "ovaz" for the feminine. Of course I sound childlike and even ignorant in seeking directions on the streets of Moscow. The bottom line was that I credited Hanna with a considerable intellect, but I lacked the means of communicating with her.

As we talked, she suddenly crossed her legs in a very human fashion. Somehow, it made me aware of her gender. Or, perhaps, the thought that her intelligence was being blocked by lack of extensive speech took my mind back to Andries' obvious desire to have a grandson with whom he might communicate more freely.

On reflection, I must say that I can't remember a lascivious action or even thought. Not that sexuality was repressed, just that any notion in that vein seemed natural and healthy. At one point, I was trying to explain how Africa was so big and then there was a wide, wide, wide, stream—"mbale"—far, far, far, that is called an ocean before you reach America, and I was drawing with my finger on the table. Hanna reached out and put her larger hand on top of mine. It was a friendly touch. I did feel a physical rapport. I can't say whether it was different from what you feel when a little puppy jumps up into your arms and you respond to its warmth and physical closeness. Except that there were human expressions in Hanna's eyes. Once, she rubbed my hand, and I really thought for an instant that I caught a glint in her eye. It wasn't a broad "come hither" such as Mae West would burlesque. But there was a slight electrical snap that touched a chord within me.

What didn't seem particularly human was the shortness of hair on her head. One has an image of most human females as having hair that falls toward their shoulders. But this isn't true of African women and they certainly seem feminine to me. I don't know quite what it was. When Hanna suggested that we make some lunch, and she went outside with the iron pot to cook rice, I did watch her hips. She swayed from side to side. Clearly she wasn't that American abomination of the 1950s, the tight-girdled, one-buttock woman. Actually, she was quite graceful. Or at least her walk was markedly different from the way gorillas walk.

While we were eating the rice, I wondered if I weren't staying too long. Andries had not said anything about whether I should just deliver the food or if I could stay and visit. I guess my fascination with Hanna had driven any other consideration from my mind. Suddenly, I heard a sharp noise from the bush about twenty yards away. It sounded like a stick breaking. My attention had been so focused on Hanna that I had forgotten all about Thys. Of course, he would be returning for his midday meal.

As I peered into the dense foliage, only the call of the bou bou broke the silence. Had Thys been observing us as we ate the rice? Was he jealous? Would he want to harm me? I looked anxiously for a weapon with which to try to defend myself against a powerful, strapping half-gorilla with human dexterity.

Hanna noticed my sudden preoccupation with the forest and turned to look herself. I wondered if she had been so occupied with me that she, too, had forgotten her brother. What would she do if Thys were angry? Somehow, I sensed that she would stand with me. The thought comforted and warmed me. If she cared about me, then I cared about her.

The forest fell silent and we returned to our lunch. Hanna finished the last of the wild celery. I almost laughed when she took the last two stalks, because she had already had most of them. She took them from the table in a moment when I was looking up at the billowing dark cumulus clouds and wondering if we were in for more rain. There was just a touch of the self-consciousness of a naughty teenager in her furtiveness and expression.

I say this despite being on my guard against being overly anthropomorphic. I have a general dislike of my fellow humans who impute all kinds of human emotions to their pets whether they be a pet turtle, a cat who likes cops and robbers on television, or a parrot who supposedly understands your thoughts.

But Hanna, and not without biological reason, had so many human qualities. My concern turned from Thys' whereabouts to Andries' anxiety in waiting for me. Better not to make too much of a good thing.

I got up to say goodbye and Hanna grasped my intention immediately. In fact, she went back to the cabin and brought me the empty sack. Then, most surprisingly, she went behind the cabin and came back with an herb that Andries had once identified for me on a walk as *Aframomum*. Hanna deftly extracted the tender and tasty pitch from several of the plants. I knew that gorillas do this in the wild, and as she put them in the sack, I wondered if her mother had taught her early on, or if her father had shown her, or if possibly Thys in some of his roaming had watched a strange gorilla do it. On a human level it was touching.

She walked to the edge of the clearing with me. I turned to say "kwaheri" before I got to my clothes. As she left, she put her large head in the curve of my left shoulder and neck. She nuzzled and made friendly low noises that were definitely not Swahili. As she moved off so gracefully, she looked back once, almost wistfully. It tugged at my emotions. Regardless of the future, I had made a friend I cared about. As I hurried along, half running, back to the cabin, I heard a distinct, almost muffled, poot-poot-poot of a full-grown gorilla. Had Hanna ever met any male gorillas? Had they attempted to mate? No, I thought, not if she didn't have estrus. As I neared the cabin I realized that I had to admit to a touch of jealousy. If she didn't have estrus, did she have menopause? Gorillas live about half the life span of humans, so Hanna could already be beyond child bearing age if she followed her gorilla genes.

Chapter 13

During dinner that night, Andries watched me for any signs of unusual behavior. I felt as calm as possible under the extraordinary circumstances and made an effort not just to be so but to appear so. My whole orientation had now changed. Yes, I was in the cabin with him. But my thoughts were never far from the log cabin of Thys and Hanna. My preoccupation with them led me to start imaginary conversations with both of them. Sometimes, as I would wait for van Straeten to make a trictrac move, I would catch my lips moving silently as I conversed with the twins.

Perhaps it was because Andries noticed this that he began a discussion of *Homo sapiens*' inability to communicate except on the most primitive level with higher primates.

"Nedt," he began, "Is it just a relatively small genetic difference that has kept other primates from having a voice box capable of a wide range of vocalization? We are not the only primates with a need to communicate. Monkeys on this mountain have been helped in their survival as a species because their warning cries when a predator approaches clearly distinguish whether the danger is from the ground, thus producing a quick leap to the trees, or whether it is in the trees, telling the monkey to get down or stay down.

"The evolution of speech must have been a function of

survival. There can be many vocal equivalents for 'watch out.' All higher primates must have moved toward speech. It is just that we have gotten there faster. But evolution obviously continues. The few million years during which man must have had speech suggest that the great apes on their own might develop natural speech in a relatively short time—that is, in evolutionary terms."

The idea hit me instantly. Van Straeten's plan was to shorten that period by procreating a one-fourth-gorilla child in the hope that the speech mechanisms would be enough like those of a human to permit something approaching human speech.

This was not to assert positively that gorillas or, especially, dolphins don't have more speech than we can understand. For that matter, difficulties in communication happen among humans. For example, Andries and I spoke French together, although mine is poor. One day he chided me for my poor high-school French and my inability to pronounce the proper "u". My defensive reply was to remind him that he had had trouble trying to pronounce some words in Topnaar Hottentot I had once used. He had brought back from a walk one day a strange sort of melon that I'd never seen. I had told him of picking a similar looking melon, the !Nara, along the Kuiseb River in what is now Namibia, and had recited a simple Topnaar song:

!Gai /usa !Nara heise, (Good food, Nara tree,

//Khuxa /usa /ken /use, thorny food, sweet food,

/Aunin oana deisi khreo., Topnaar children grow up,
sucking milk.)

Andries could not manage to copy the various "click" sounds of the Hottentot speech (though to be honest, I'm not sure that today a Topnaar would understand me, it is so long since I learned the song). Andries used our re-

spective vocal inabilities (and we had touched on tonal languages so difficult for most Europeans and Americans) to stress the human inability to understand dolphin or gorilla communications.

Andries' first stimulus to study communication had come when he was in the RAF convalescent hospital in Cornwall after his flamer. A civilian volunteer in a wheelchair often came by and did little chores for the patients. Her name was Elizabeth, after the Queen. She had cerebral palsy and could not produce understandable speech; but she could, with difficulty, use a typewriter. She told him that her teachers, up to Form Four, had not tried to communicate with her much because they assumed she had an unusually low IQ. Actually, when tested properly, she had a high IQ, but she simply couldn't express herself conventionally. Andries devised a clipboard with frequently used words and an alphabet on it, to which Elizabeth could point rapidly as a means of basic communication.

Electronics were then just approaching their wartime expansion, and many of the uses were still secret, but Andries told me he considered devoting himself to using these new discoveries to "free" the good minds in some cerebral palsy victims and in others similarly handicapped; in effect, to plug into the human communications system. Television was one avenue he wanted to explore.

When van Straeten had returned to Mechelen at the time his mother was dying, he had gone to a veterans' hospital for a checkup. While he was there, he looked up a surgeon he had known in a wartime hospital. Dr. de Meilieur specialized in thoracic surgery and in reconstruction of the voice box when it had been shot away. From what Andries learned from this specialist, he became convinced that, with the same time and study of techniques, gorillas could be given adequate vocal powers so as to enable them to speak human languages. Then this small but

vital physiological difference in the two primates would not be the enormous barrier to learning. What powers of intellectual thought might lie in the gorilla brain? Andries dismissed mere brain size when he said, "The human brain may have a lot of quite unnecessary and outmoded parts—almost surely it does, just as we have vestigial tails we don't need—and gorillas may have every bit of the necessary gray matter that we do."

"Do nonhuman primates think about the past in a conscious way or do they plan for their future aside from instinctive behavior? Does any species except man contemplate death?"

Andries stopped me with a wave of his hand. "Precisely, precisely, Nedt. But we cannot really discover if other higher primates have this quality 'displacement' until we can discuss it with them."

"Look, my friend," I asked, getting more into the conversation, "Isn't it possible that the twins might be able to speak distinctly and more easily with a relatively simple operation on the voice box?"

Of all the motives van Straeten had in mind, conscious and subconscious, I sensed that the question of speech, communication, and then exchanges of complex thought came very high. In his bookcase was a battered copy of Robert and Ada Yerkes's study of *The Great Apes*, published in 1929 when Robert Yerkes was Professor of Psychobiology at Yale. The authors quoted Traill's 1818 study of chimpanzees, in which the conclusion was drawn that it is mental deficiency that blocks speech and not corporeal capacity. The Yerkeses claimed that the larynx of the chimpanzee is most like that of man, followed by that of the gibbon, the gorilla, and the orangutan. Andries strongly disagreed.

Pulling out half a dozen text books, none of which he felt was adequate, he launched into an explanation of how

gorillas are close to being able to speak like humans, which, convincing as it sounded, was beyond my capacity to judge.

“First,” he began, “the ability of man to vocalize is primarily a function of how the mouth cavity can resonate. The *orbicularis oris* contracts to produce humanoid grunts in man and gorilla.” But Andries later explained that the baboon is possibly better at this than the gorilla and may be more socially advanced as a result.

“The grunts of early man,” he explained in the most pedantic tone of voice I ever heard him use, “evolved along with facial expressions to convey information as to possible danger. If your group could understand, you avoided the lion; if it couldn’t, then you died out as a line of mutation. Although the vocal cords of man and gorilla are quite blunt compared with those of the ‘lower’ primates, man’s larynx is much farther down the throat and away from the soft palate than the gorilla’s is. This condition developed as man stood more and more erect. [Later, I would look for the degree of erectness in the offspring as a broad clue to their possible speech.] The *foramen magnum* moves forward to the base of the skull at the same time that the mandible becomes smaller. As the larynx moves downward, the cavity for resonance is increased and makes possible the low pitch of man.”

Andries paused in his soliloquy, walked back and forth in front of the fire, poured himself more chai, and went on: “The twins may have brought the voice box of the gorilla closer to that of man by an order of five or ten million years.”

“Instant evolution,” I quipped. But he didn’t hear me.

“Facial expression has not been studied enough,” he went on. “When a man or a gorilla tastes something unpleasant, the reaction is the same. What is called the ‘zygomaticus’ contracts quickly; the levator muscles come into play, the corners of the lips pull back, and the tongue ap-

pears. I've watched it a hundred times in gorillas," he said. I looked into the fire and speculated, with little actual knowledge to go on, as to how much of a change in the position or parts of the mouth cavity would be required to allow recognizable speech—if the intelligence were there to use it.

Andries' passion for finding a way for humans to communicate with the higher primates was so intense that it really frightened me. He had rather dismissed as inadequate the teaching of young chimps to put together sentences, and he had little faith in electronic approaches for the long pull. He wanted vocal communication from primate to primate. He said, I forget in what context, "Nedt, once we can talk together, then it will not be difficult for the great apes to write—eventually to produce their own books on history, philosophy, or whatever."

So the man acknowledged the possibility of a surgical procedure for Hanna and Thys. But this would clearly mean exposure to the wider world. Characteristically, he had come to the simpler conclusion, for him, of overseeing a three-fourths human-gorilla combination as a way to jump another five million years or so, and then there would be free and easy speech without impediments. On that note we retired. A gentle rain was falling and it lulled me to sleep.

Chapter 14

During the next two days, as van Straeten recovered from his cold. I took food to the twins. Andries had instructed me just to greet them, leave the food, and return. Hanna seemed—at least to my mind as I anthropomorphized—to want to be closer. The second day she put her arm around me as I left and said, “Asante.” Thys seemed—again from my human perspective—a little aloof. Maybe he felt that, because of the one longer time I had spent alone with Hanna, she and I were better friends. I was feeling good about myself and the whole situation. That is, until I returned to the cabin after lunchtime on the third day of my food visits.

Someone was in the cabin with Andries. I started to retreat up the path but another man, who had been standing guard, saw me and indicated with the barrel of his Kala I was to enter the cabin.

I didn't recognize either of the two Africans. One was a Hutu and one a seven-foot-tall-Tutsi who had to crouch when he stood up in the low ceilinged cabin. The two men were obviously friends. They opposed the latest Tutsi invasion from Uganda and were equally horrified at the radio reports of mass killings of Tutsi by the retreating Hutu. They wanted Andries to go to both leaders and try to work out a truce. They had no faith in the French who armed the Hutu government. Neither did they trust the

Americans who had trained the Tutsi officers.

Because Belgium had more or less stayed out of the internecine fighting, it was considered neutral. They looked to van Straeten, as a Belgian officer, as the best negotiator.

I had not noted it before, but with the passage of the years, Andries eye flickering had noticeably decreased. He didn't appear as some apparition at first sight.

The two visitors seemed to know about van Straeten's offspring but nothing specific was said. There was just enough of a hint to suggest blackmail. Andries did discuss with them his urgent hope for peace in the Mountains of the Moon. Although the Dian Fossey gorillas were a long way away, a state of civil war would leave all mountain gorillas unprotected from poachers, and certainly threaten the secrecy of van Straeten's experiment.

Andries agreed to go. He asked the visitors to wait at the crossroads down the trail so he could discuss matters with me. Would I look after his offspring? He didn't need to voice the request. I assured Andries of my reliability. The sense of being needed sent strength flowing through me. I was assuming that the Africans really needed him and weren't just using the story as a decoy to get him off our mountain. I would protect the twins while he was gone. Which prompted me to say: "You must show me just how to use the Kala." I didn't ask. I stated.

"Oui," he answered immediately. He took out his key chain, opened the lock, and handed the keys to me. "If your landrover doesn't start, you can use mine if you need to go to Kisenyi."

I thought that his world might be falling apart around him. But he seemed to take the diversion as just that; not a permanent setback. He must have been reassured that they knew me now. If this had happened earlier, his dilemma would have been intense.

I didn't know exactly why his meeting with the two

visitors was to be at dusk. Perhaps it was a form of concealment. The Banyarwanda police rarely went out after dusk and people in the small mountain villages on the way down would all be asleep, since they could not afford lights at night except for an occasional fire of scarce wood.

Suddenly, after all the drama, there were three hours to fill. I took out the trictrac board.

“Non,” he was emphatic, “we have a lot to do.”

“First,” and he held up a finger and then went to the wall of books. He took out a thick oversize book and laid it on top of the trictrac. It had a single word title: Ruwenzori. He opened it to the title page: “Mission Scientifique Belge 1932.”

Andries explained: “When my countrymen were here, they found a cave but it isn’t on the maps in this book. You may need a refuge for yourself, Hanna, and Thys. It is just in case—until I get back from Dar. There is some canned food there and you can get water from the glacier. But we need to store some more food before I have to meet my friends down the road.”

He gathered supplies and we put them into rucksacks.

As we climbed, Andries walked zestfully. I even wondered if he hadn’t been suffering from “cabin fever” and actually welcomed the forced challenge of going to the Tanzanian capital. But his mind was on what I would do in his absence.

“Nedt,” he said as the trail widened a bit and we could walk abreast, “there is something for you to look into while I’m gone.”

“What?” I asked, a little apprehensive.

“Oh, nothing dangerous,” he replied as though he had caught my concern. “Some research actually.”

“Andries, what research can I do here, especially if you are going to show me a cave where I may have to hole up for a while?”

"That is the point, my American friend. If you are around the cave you will be surrounded by your hunting."

"Hunting?" I looked at him startled.

"Hunting for pre-hominoid fossils," he said, with the smile that barely creased his cheeks.

"Pre-hominoids here, at this altitude?" I asked.

"Yes, Nedt. Pre-hominoids from a period in time when our ancestors lived almost entirely in the water."

I sensed that he was joking. "That's a fishy story," I replied, trying to meet his jocularity.

"No," he said, his voice suddenly more serious. "Crania of our ancestors from the Miocene when we were mammals but had retreated to the water. Do you realize that there is an enormous scientific gap in pre-hominoid finds from twelve million to four million years ago? Did it ever occur to you that the reason is that our ancestors retreated to the water twelve million years ago and stayed there for eight million years?"

"Andries, you are putting me on. I never heard such a thing. You must be making it up." I caught myself. I didn't want to challenge him, on the one hand, but on the other, I didn't want him to take me for a complete scientific ignoramus.

There was no talk of the African guerrillas or of his impending departure as we walked single file up the mountain. We stopped in a saddle at about 9,000 feet and he smoked a Gaulois, speaking only to point out where some gorillas had made a night nest. It was as though he were putting his peace making trip completely out of his mind.

"Andries, what did you mean about our ancestors living in the sea and what does that have to do with this hike?"

"Well, my Amerikaner, this could be an area of Miocene rocks. During the Miocene the earth got extremely warm by present-day standards. Our ancestors survived by living mainly in the sea."

“But, but,” I was almost sputtering, “I’ve never heard any evidence of this. You are always quick to cite sources for your ideas. Where are they now?” It wasn’t a direct challenge, but I was entitled to ask bluntly.

He turned from where he sat on a fallen log, crossed his legs, lit another Gaulois, and said a little condescendingly, “The evidence is in your powers of observation, my dear Nedt. Just think. What distinguishes us from apes? Why are we alone hairless? That condition came from our millions of years in the water while our then-cousins, the apes, retreated to higher elevations for coolness. It was either into the water or up the mountains. Wet hair is a nuisance in warm water. It impedes swimming and picks up debris.

“Furthermore, we are different from gorillas and chimpanzees and oranges because we walk upright. You know, that is not a very natural way to proceed. But it is easy to walk upright in shallow water, where we lived during the Miocene. That is how we got from four legs to two, and a jolly bit better we are than the apes.”

Andries’ years in Britain came through in the “jolly,” I thought. He was in full steam by now, as was his habit:

“How do you think we came to use tools? We had to crack shells along the seashore. There was a great food shortage because so many genera of plants could not adapt to the much higher temperatures of the Miocene.”

I still didn’t know whether this was one of his attempts at wry humor. After his next comment, I was fairly sure of it because somehow sex was often at the bottom of one of his “lines of thinking,” as he called them.

“Nedt,” he went on, “have you ever wondered at the function of the hymen? Women don’t really need one today since we live on land. Moreover, it usually disappears after first intercourse. But during the Miocene, when our ancestors lived in the water, the hymen functioned to keep

the vagina closed. At that period in our evolution, the muscles attached to it were much stronger and allowed it to move aside for intercourse and then come back into place, thus sealing the entrance from the water.”

I looked at Andries, but if he saw my quizzical stare, he appeared to take no notice.

“Just consider how humans have traditionally copulated face to face. This is a most unusual position among terrestrial mammals. If there were a gorilla or chimpanzee social historian, I’m sure that he would describe this bizarre face-to-face copulation as one of the strangest of human characteristics. But almost all marine mammals copulate face to face, such as whales and our near cousins the dolphins.”

Now I admit that van Straeten’s scientific ideas were stimulating to me, and I had a considerable tolerance for listening to his often long-winded soliloquies. But my interest couldn’t compete on this afternoon with the thought of his departing in another two hours, leaving me with full responsibility for the twins.

We emerged in a clearing that gave a magnificent view of the serried tops of snow-clad peaks. Andries went on talking as I took in the breath-taking landscape. I finally tuned into him as he concluded.

“So you must agree with me.”

“Wait, Andries, you go too fast. How can you expect me to discuss such a scientific topic this afternoon?”

“But Nedt, you will be free to hunt for miocene fossils for a week or more. . . .”

I didn’t like the way he said “or more.”

“... so you must know the significance of what you may find.”

“Andries,” I started. I could sense that he was really intense. He had suddenly conferred on me the ability to tell fossils from one era to another although I was but a babe when it came to geology. But I didn’t say that and

tried to go along with his thinking by at least asking an intelligent question:

“What you say about mammals in the sea may be true. But what about seals? They have certainly been marine dwellers for eons, and they haven’t lost their hair.”

He, too, paused for a moment. “No theory is ever 100 percent accurate. But how else do you account for the eight-million-year gap in the fossil record? And besides, seals may have learned to copulate on the beach, but they too are still face-to-face like marine animals.” That gave me something to think about. We were at the bottom of a terminal glacier.

“The cave is over here,” Andries called as he walked rapidly away from me.

In front of it was a small cairn of rocks. Andries put his rucksack down, took out a small Belgian flag, and placed it on top of the cairn. He held it while he motioned me to put a rock on it to hold it down in the stiff wind. Was it an epitaph for a dream, I wondered?

Inside the cave there were food supplies and several blankets piled in the dust. It was freezing cold and I wondered how one kept warm at night. There was very little firewood. But that problem seemed far off. Andries looked at his watch and pronounced:

“We have to hurry. I don’t want them coming back to our cabin...” The “our” made me feel good. “If I don’t meet them on time.”

We came down the trail quickly. I remembered the lone colobus monkey that had been plucked off the mountain by the eagle long ago. In a sense, Andries was being plucked off the mountain by a powerful force that just swooped down on him.

As we neared the cabin, I heard the sound of a stick being broken nearby. We both froze to listen. The wind was whistling and it seemed as if the sharp “crack” had

been in my imagination. Still, the most recent visitors may not have trusted Andries. Perhaps they had trailed us up the mountain. If that were true, the old Belgian cave would be more a trap than a refuge. I didn't say anything about it to my friend. He had enough on his mind.

As I conjectured, Andries led the way down until we were at the cabin. I asked him, "Are you going to say goodbye to them again?"

He didn't speak but shook his head negatively. I felt guilty about having reminded him of the parting, though it must be uppermost in his mind. There was a cold side to van Straeten that I didn't like.

It took him no more than ten minutes to gather some effects together. He looked at the trictrac board a little woefully, I thought, as though it symbolized our long discussions that now faced a hiatus.

But no sentiment. Van Straeten was a sentimental man but not at moments such as this. I had tears in my eyes as he left. Tears of affection and apprehension. It reminded me of being at the Super Chief at the train station in Chicago when my father went off to the South Pacific in World War II, later to be reported missing in action on New Georgia Island. The comparison made me shiver. Would I ever see van Straeten again? I tried to hide my feelings because I knew he would disapprove.

Finally he was off, striding purposefully down the lower trail. He did turn once to wave, and then disappeared. I was alone. But there were the twins. And I could expect visitors.

Chapter 15

Although it was alien to my nature, I began to carry the Kala with me at all times. Just to be sure it was in working order, I fired a round at the top of a huge podocarpus tree. My heart stopped when an apparently sleeping owl began dropping toward the ground. What a marksman, I thought to myself, you try to aim so as not to kill anything and then—but the owl unfolded its wings after a hundred feet, obviously unhurt.

I had been discouraged over the lack of progress in my conversations with the twins. They clearly had strong emotions and were sensitive, but we just weren't communicating. For instance, I had picked up another sliver in my foot and their tenderness in extracting it was human. But there was no increase in concepts. They learned new nouns quite readily. I found this with English words, though that could eventually have been confusing in that they also knew, for example, the Kiswahili, French, and English for "hand." They did learn that *pesi pesi* meant quickly.

Two days after Andries left, I was sitting at the table with Hanna when it happened. We were playing with burnt wooden matches, which she saved, to build up a small tower by laying alternate rows in different directions. We were about equal to getting up to eight or nine rows before an inadvertent touch would tumble the unstable pile. Then. . .

"Pesi pesi!" Thys' voice had an urgent quality I had

never heard before. He was about twenty yards away at the edge of the clearing but he was whispering. I'd never heard him whisper and that added to the urgency. I rushed toward him, wondering how he had learned to whisper. As I got there, he reached out and gripped my left shoulder. It was a hard grip and it hurt. He obviously didn't know his strength when excited. He whispered, "*poli poli*"—slowly, slowly—as he began to inch his way into the underbrush.

About thirty yards into the brush, he stopped and pointed. I leaned forward to look around him, my left arm on his back, where I could feel that his hair had stiffened.

Three short Africans, probably Hutu, were sitting in a small clearing with their backs to us. One was using a thin wire to make a trap. Their guns lay loosely on the ground. Finally, the one on the end got up to attach the thin wire to a small sapling.

I suddenly felt numb. I had not brought my Kala. I tapped Thys on the shoulder. He turned his head slowly and I mimicked putting a gun to my shoulder. He had seen me fire it and understood my gesture.

Just then, I could hear Hanna running and her voice so loud it might as well have been on a loudspeaker: "*Wapi, wapi?*" (Where, where?) The men in the clearing froze, then grabbed their guns. They didn't look at us because Hanna had not followed us directly and her voice was off to the side. The three men plunged into the bush in that direction.

The moment they left the little clearing, making a lot of noise as they plunged through the brush, we abandoned all caution and ran flat out for the cabin. I soon outdistanced Thys, who could not run with a smooth stride. I had reached the cabin, picked up the Kala, and was coming out again when Thys burst past me. From behind a debbi can in the corner, he drew out a long iron bar. The end he brandished as he joined me at the door was covered

with a dark brown substance. I had a flashback to a few years previous. Could it? Could it be the Pygmy's dried blood? The thought disappeared as we moved together in the direction we thought Hanna had taken.

When we heard no sounds, we slowed to a careful walk, keeping silence. Then we heard Hanna's voice asking matter-of-factly:

“*Wewe nataka chagula?*” (Do you want food?)

We moved forward quietly.

The three men she had addressed were just staring at her as though she were an apparition. Suddenly one of them, an older man, dropped his gun and ran off into the bush screaming something at the top of his lungs. Then the forest was dead silent, as though all creatures were eavesdropping.

The shorter of the other two men grabbed Hanna rudely by the arm and started to pull her after his fleeing companion. Hanna was considerably heavier and she tugged back, holding her ground. The third man viciously shoved his gun barrel into her ribs. As she let out a scream of pain, Thys rushed forward, covered the ten yards in a second, and brought the iron bar down on her assailant's head with a crunch. The man slumped to the ground. The whole left side of his braincase was ripped open.

The man who had been tugging on Hanna let go and swung his carbine around at Thys. I reached him and brought the Kala down on his head, but he got off a shot as he fell. I hit him again as he lay on the ground, smashing his face. I stopped for an instant, not horrified, as I would have thought, but exultant and relieved. I turned to Hanna and Thys saying, “*Kwisha*” (finished).

Only then did I notice that Thys was on the ground, blood oozing out of his hairy chest. His sister was immediately on him, trying to staunch the flow with her fingers. He looked pale—I knew it even though I cannot recall that

his dark skin had changed color. "Don't panic. Think," I told myself. Thys was not speaking and I didn't like the way his eyes lolled open.

I tried to explain to Hanna that Andries had a large medicine kit in the cabin. I would get it and be right back. She nodded. As I ran to the cabin, I realized that I had left her undefended with at least one of the attacking Hutus at large. How far his fright might have taken him, I couldn't know. I ran faster. The medicine chest was too big to bring. I tore into it with fumbling fingers. I collected something to clean the wound, compresses and adhesive tape, and finally, penicillin and a syringe to deliver it. I thought of something for shock but all the medicines were labeled in French and I couldn't decipher them. The penicillin I was sure about because it read "pénicilline."

When I reached the twins, Hanna had Thys by the shoulders and was shaking him. I gently but firmly moved her aside, leaned down and pressed my right ear to his heart. I couldn't pick up a beat. I tried to find a pulse on one of his limp wrists but it was different enough from a human wrist that I didn't know if I were missing the throb.

Quickly I bathed his chest with disinfectant. I tried with my little finger to extract the bullet but didn't feel it and hesitated to do greater damage by probing further. As I put the compress on, Hanna grasped what I was doing and held it in place as I put on the adhesive tape. I put the penicillin into the syringe and pumped it all into his arm just below the shoulder.

Then, having done all I could think to do, I pulled back to take stock. He seemed clearly to have gone. Hanna tried to hold her brother's huge head steady between her fingers, but when she let go, it fell like that of a limp doll. Only then did I think of the guerrilla who had fled in apparent fear. Did he have another weapon? Was he going to join a larger band that would return? I tried to lift Thys by

putting my arm under his shoulder. He was much too heavy for the two of us to carry. I looked at Hanna. Her dark eyes were filled with tears. If there are no gorilla tears, they must be human tears. They rolled down her dark face. She put her head on my shoulder and I comforted her as I would a sister. We were two people sharing a loss. After several minutes, I wiped the tears from my eyes and looked at poor Thys. Finally, I placed the bag in which I had carried the medical supplies on his head. There was no time to dig a grave now. Maybe later we could return with shovels.

Hanna came with me back to the cabin—naturally. The idea of our being separated never occurred to me. Clearly, we couldn't stay there without danger. The guerrillas would want revenge for the two we had killed. And they might be fascinated and excited at the prospect of such exotic *muti* (medicine) as the hands and feet of a half-human gorilla.

Hanna sensed my turmoil and I felt she gave me emotional support. But there was no way that I could communicate to her the whole gamut of possibilities that ran through my mind and what options we might have before us.

Hastily I packed some food and clothes into a rucksack. She stood patiently as I adjusted the straps on Andries' rucksack—letting them out all the way. She smiled as I settled the weight for her.

I put together my own things, not forgetting matches, maps, extra ammunition, and clothes. Hanna looked at me in astonishment as I put on my hiking clothes. I felt I should give her something to wear. It was all very strange, and she adjusted better to the sight of me with clothes than I did having them on when she didn't.

But there wasn't time to reflect. Even at the danger of being attacked, we had to do something to protect Thys.

So we carried an axe and shovels down to where poor Thys lay lifeless. First, we dragged him into a clump of bushes. Hanna, on her own initiative, went back over the trail his body had made and smoothed out the dirt with her hands and pulled the grasses upright.

We worked hard but it was hot and heavy going. We kept striking shallow roots with the shovel and would have to use the axe. Soon my clothes were sopping wet and I looked at Hanna with some envy. She dug better than I did with the shovel, using her greater muscular strength and weight to take deeper shovelfuls. Finally, we eased Thys into his grave, shoveled back the dirt, made a mound with the extra, and then placed random debris on it. At least he was safe from hyenas or vultures—animal ones that is.

I suppose I should have found Hanna a few flowers to place on the grave of her twin. But there was a real-life urgency. When we left, we didn't go back past the cabin, but climbed to the east, toward Uganda, and made for the east saddle of our mountain. Once we were walking along, Hanna following me because she sensed I knew where I wanted to go; I realized that I really didn't know where we two were heading in either a geographical or a metaphysical sense.

My heady euphoria at having escaped with our lives kept my steps light. But then when I must have been four or five strides ahead, Hanna called "*kuja hapa*."

So I returned to where she was, a few steps off the path and eating some red berries. I'd seen them but never knew they were edible. Funny, van Straeten hadn't taught me everything. But Hanna was teaching me. I reached down and stripped off a handful. They had a sort of wild, cranberry-like flavor. It was her first contribution to solving our dilemma.

Chapter 16

We continued to travel east toward the Uganda border. Once we were clear of the immediate camp, and in no imminent danger of the Hutu group finding us, I took stock. Hanna understood when I pointed toward an easterly peak as a beacon and emphasized that we were to travel “*eko*” or “there.” She affirmed this with “*ndio*,” and took the lead, I followed more or less blindly. Most of the time there were tracks of one sort or another. The forest is rarely a solid dense stand, especially in this part of Africa where the great variety of vegetation tends to leave breaks.

But where was I going? Away from people. Away from the curious Europeans in Kisenyi. Away from the heavily populated lower slopes of the Rwanda side of the Ruwenzori range. Away from avengers, I hoped.

But what was I going to? I had absorbed too much of van Straeten’s concern for his children to contemplate finding some way for Hanna to enter so-called Western society. She would be locked up, imprisoned behind bars, enslaved. What would it do to her free spirit? I shuddered to think. Could I find an isolated vale, build a shelter, leave Hanna and go to some Uganda town, buy tools, and come back and build a proper home to which I could bring supplies? It would have been better to escape in my landrover. But the danger of Hanna’s being discovered had put it right out of my mind.

All these thoughts swirled as I followed Hanna single file. After a couple of hours, we came down a ravine to cross a small mountain stream, and I said, "*kwisha*." It was enough for a while. The water from the melting snow was icy, and it was refreshing to bathe one part of my anatomy at a time. Hanna bent over and drank from her two cupped hands. She could have been my sister back on the trail in Michigan. I took off my shoes and socks and soaked my feet. Good thing that Andries and I had done so much walking. Heaven knows how far we will have to walk, I thought, as we sat in the shade of a thunbergianthus with its enormous pink flowers. Andries had told me this tree was endemic to the Ruwenzori.

Opening Hanna's rucksack, which I had helped her put on the ground, I got out two somewhat moldy pieces of chocolate, which we shared. She wanted more—"Asante," thank you, she said in advance. "*Hapana sazahevi*," not right away, I had to tell her.

We had been walking eastward for about half an hour after the break when I heard a familiar "hooohoo" not far ahead. The gorilla group sounded as though they were feeding at peace. I thought to ask Hanna to stop. But something made me just keep following her. Then she stopped so suddenly that I almost knocked her over from behind. Straight ahead, across a narrow clearing, was a huge silverback gorilla. He stood up and surveyed the strange apparitions we must have seemed. It is good that there isn't so much poaching on the Uganda side, I thought in a flash, and perhaps he doesn't fear humans.

But the silverback wasn't looking at me. His eyes were focused on Hanna. He advanced across the clearing, pounding his chest in a typical display and "hooing."

Hanna turned to me half frightened, half mystified. Something made me lay down the Kalasnikov, stand on my tiptoes, pummel my chest and go: "Hooohoo." Hanna

copied my actions, and we stood side by side, beating our chests. I felt more animal than human.

The great silverback had stopped. He peered at us intently with his poor eyesight. Two female gorillas appeared at the back of the clearing, watching intently. The silverback gave one final crash of his arms against his chest and then calmly turned around and walked back as if to say, "What's so special about you?"

My arm was around Hanna and I could feel her trembling. Together we had again faced danger. Must she think that both sides of her heritage were potential killers? She answered me with one word: "*Rafiki*"? The way she nodded her head she was saying "friend" in a positive connotation. I honestly didn't know what to answer. Should I warn her? Would I be instilling an unwarranted fear?

Hanna looked at me, waiting for some judgment on my part. I swallowed with difficulty. "*Ndio. Rafiki.*" I finally said.

Then very definitely, as though claiming part of her own roots, she said emphatically, "*Rafiki mimi.*" "My friends."

She put her hand on my shoulder and gave me a gentle shove until I was sitting on a fallen log. She started to move to the clearing, came back, and gave me another shove as if to root me to the spot, and reiterated, "*Rafiki mimi, hapana wewe.*"

Well, there was some logic in that they were her friends and not mine.

As Hanna moved confidently into the clearing and across it; walking erect, of course, she did stagger once or twice. I wondered whether the tension she must be under had brought on the staggering that I had discussed with Andries. As she neared the brush opposite, I could see a pair of dark gorilla eyes peering from the dense foliage. I was taking a chance. A chance that she might be attacked. At least she is a female, I thought, and trusted that the gi-

ant silverback realized that. Would sexual rivalry and fear persist in the silverback if it had been poor dead Thys?

But then I wondered if Hanna would be coming back. I heard a thrashing of branches across the clearing such as gorillas make when preparing a nest for the night. I was tempted to cross the clearing and to try to observe for myself. But Hanna was an adult. She would have to make her way, perhaps, in some world. Better a gorilla one, I thought, and then wondered if I were not being terribly paternalistic.

My speculations were blotted out by fear when I heard voices behind me. The louder one sounded like the older man who had escaped alive from our confrontation. He must have returned with others of the Hutu band and followed our trail these many miles. Damn, I thought, as I pulled myself into the shelter of the pink blossoms. We should have walked for some distance in the stream to try to throw off any pursuers. I had been naively confident.

The voices came nearer. They were following our trail easily. I didn't want to have to cross the clearing with them behind me. They would be carrying spears with double points, I knew, perhaps poison tipped, and possibly a rifle or two. The voices sounded as though there were three men.

They must not find Hanna, was my paramount thought. She must not be killed to brew a magic medicine. My choice was clear.

I bolted along the side of the clearing, not crossing it but heading down the slope. At the sound of my running, shouts went up behind me. Maybe they had seen me. They had.

"*Bwana-Bwana-Muzungu.*" "The white boss," I heard.

I ran faster, now more than ever glad that I had gone to the cabin for heavy shoes. I crashed through the brush heedless of danger. I seemed to be losing on them gradu-

ally. I had gone about a quarter of a mile when I paused to catch my breath. I could hear them perhaps two hundred yards distant, coming after me. But at least I was leading them away from where Hanna had joined the gorillas.

I began to run again, as fast as I could. Suddenly something caught my leg and I was immediately swung high into the air, hanging head down. My ankle, by which I was held, hurt like hell. I struggled to reach behind me and grab the liana that held me. Instinctively I knew I had stepped into a poacher's trap attached to a strong sapling that had been bent over. When I pulled the trap the sapling sprang back to an almost erect position, leaving me dangling helplessly.

In this predicament, I was almost relieved when the Africans arrived to find me exhausted from struggling to free myself. The lead man paused and cocked his spear behind his ear. I went limp in anticipation. My world was spinning from hanging upside down and I must have fainted. The next thing I knew, I was on the ground, my hands painfully tied behind my back with lianas. A man I had never seen, with a dark stubble of a beard, kicked me and commanded, "*Kwenda.*"

I struggled to my feet, my head reeling with pain and my balance unsteady. With one man ahead and two behind, we set off on a path farther down the mountain. I heard no sound of the gorilla troupe or of Hanna. For that I was grateful.

An exhausting hour and a half later, we came into a clearing where a green tent had been set up and food was cooking over an open fire. The bearded one pushed me roughly to the ground near the fire. I lay there breathing heavily and wary of being kicked. From the corner of my eye, I saw that the flap of the green tent was opening. A man started to come out. It was van Straeten.

Chapter 17

Andries walked over to me without a flicker of expression. He kicked the red soil near my head so that dust covered my face and I choked when I breathed. Any strength I had left drained out of me. I didn't feel anger, or betrayal, or fear. I did wonder if perhaps all along he had planned for the Marxist group to kill me. Perhaps he thought it wouldn't be so bad if he didn't do it.

There was a burst of French between Andries and the bearded one. I grasped that they wanted Andries to question me about the whereabouts of the special gorilla.

Andries came back to me and knelt down. Shouting at me he demanded, "Where is she?" And then he whispered so fast I could barely follow, "Don't tell me."

I didn't know if some of the guerrillas had a smattering of English. Van Straeten's face was taut with strain. He kept yelling questions at me without giving me a chance to reply. Finally, I whispered, "Hanna is alive, Thys is dead."

The sorrow in his eyes contrasted with the verbal abuse he kept hurling at me, but several times I was sure that despite his batting eyelids, he had managed a wink. I described where I had been found. At least the band knew that themselves.

Van Straeten straightened up, and turned confidently to the Africans by the fire, speaking to them in French. The gist of it seemed to be:

“He can’t show us because he has no map. But he says that if we take him back to where he was captured, he’ll direct us.”

With that the bearded one came over, grabbed me by the collar, and dragged me to a stout sapling. My wrists hurt terribly from the tight binding and, I confess, I pleaded for them to be loosened, “Asante, asante.”

My words seem to upset Andries, who was with the main group, and he moved farther away out of earshot.

“Beard” paid no heed. He pulled a length of real rope from his belt and lashed my liana-bound hands to the tree. I could lie on my side, back to the tree, but the pain in my shoulder sockets made it impossible to rest. Soon the band of men were eating. I watched discreetly but Andries never looked my way. Truthfully, to watch them all eat didn’t make me hungry. I was thirsty. Finally the old man, who had first run away when he saw Hanna, came over with a cup of water and gently poured it down my mouth.

I just lay there. The men were about twenty yards away. Although I could hear their voices, nothing was intelligible. To this day, I can clearly picture a clump of big flowers from an eight-foot-high Ruwenzori balsam. They were about five feet away and seemed tantalizingly like Christmas tree ornaments. Their large white surface streaked with crimson, they hung from long thin stems that held them away from the tree and gave them the unreal Christmas ball appearance as they swayed slightly in the evening breeze.

I could see from my uncomfortable position that the men were all drinking banana beer. As I well knew, it is potent stuff, and I shivered at the thought of being tortured for fun by the increasingly drunken gang. Andries seemed to be drinking along with the rest, but his voice was not one of the boisterous ones.

I felt some relief when, about nine, with an almost full

moon beginning to rise from the Congo side, they wrapped themselves in blankets near the fire and went to sleep. By now the shock of my capture had begun to wear off. In addition to the pain I felt from the lianas cutting into my wrists, I began to shiver in the damp air. At night on the equator at 8,000 feet you need blankets. That was precisely what one of the figures was carrying as he left the dwindling campfire. I couldn't make out which one it was as I lay shivering and apprehensive.

It was Andries. He covered me with a thin blanket without saying a word. Then he glanced back nervously over his shoulder at the now somnolent Africans. He felt for my right hand, found it, and suddenly I felt the handle of a knife in it.

"Wait, Nedt. Go when we are all asleep. You must protect Hanna. It doesn't matter what happens to me if they think I helped you escape. Travel well, *mon ami*."

I whispered my thanks as he quickly got up and left. Grateful I was, but I couldn't understand why he hadn't cut the ropes that bundle my wrists to the thick sapling. I wasn't sure I could manage to free myself even with a knife.

My irritation was forgotten as "Beard" roused himself, urinated at the edge of the clearing, and then approached me. Quickly, I slid the knife down under my stomach. As he reached me, he bent down and checked the knots. He drew taut the line from them to the tree and then gave a sharp pull, dragging me another foot toward the tree. I couldn't refrain from an exclamation of pain. It made him laugh as he stumbled back to his blanket and rolled over in it.

Thank God for the moon. Mountains of the Moon, I bless you, I thought, as my eyes checked the motionless forms. They all seemed to be asleep. Van Straeten had gone into the tent.

I worked the knife back into my hands and feverishly went to work to cut the binding. It took me about ten minutes, and when I was free I had to rub my wrists to restore circulation. Taking my bearings from the moon, and from a peak to the west whose snowcap was like white satin in the luminous light, I gingerly and soundlessly left the campsite and headed for the Uganda border.

Walking through the night, I could hear the whirr of the fruit-eating bats. Andries had said I was responsible for Hanna. To carry out that trust, I would have to be responsible for myself. I had to get to a Uganda town, arrange for some funds to be cabled to me, buy supplies, get a gun and perhaps some bodyguards, and try to find Hanna.

I must have traveled for five miles. It was tough going and I acquired too many cuts and bruises to count. When I lost the moonlight, I knew it was time to stop. Of course, there are dangers in sleeping at the base of a large podocarpus—dangers from beings as small as your fingernail, as buzzy as a mosquito, as long as a snake, not to mention primates. But such worries would have been luxuries in my state.

At dawn, I arose hungry and still tired. Fear and concern for Hanna pushed me steadily eastward. About two hours later, I crossed a forestry trail, followed it to wider laterite road, and eventually, some time after noon, to a wide thoroughfare. I found myself walking behind some Banyarwanda, seasonal migrants going to work in the Baganda cotton fields. They carried all their possessions with them, including long mats balanced on their heads, cooking pots, and, for those who could afford them, a pair of shoes with the knotted laces tied to their belt. No intelligent seasonal worker would wear out good shoe leather on just making the trip.

Africans on the whole are extremely hospitable. The

people of this corner of Africa have a sharing nature. The migratory group took me in, gave me plantains to eat, and applied some kind of poultice to an infected scratch when we stopped at a stream to wash and drink.

Late that afternoon a rickety bus stopped. My head was down as I plodded forward, but the driver apparently noticed my skin color and asked if I wanted a ride. Cut it anyway you want, race is a vital factor in human relations in that part of Africa. Despite all the tensions of colonialism, and the travails of independence, it was assumed that Africans would give special help to a *muzungu* or white person. Furthermore, I doubt if the bus driver could conceive that one way or another he wouldn't get a reward. A "European" without a shilling? Impossible.

The bus carried me around so many hairpin turns that I was nearly dizzy. That the brakes were almost worn out was obvious, but the bliss of riding and not walking was such a relief that I couldn't worry a pennyworth. Finally, we reached the White Horse Inn in Kabale. The manager welcomed me, and at my request advanced ten shillings for the driver. It was after supper time, and I went to bed with only some sticks of raw sugarcane to chew on for sweet sustenance.

* * *

Not a muscle was without an ache when I awoke to the sun streaming in through two ragged red curtains and covering my cot in a warm embrace. Gradually, I awoke fully. How strange, I thought then, that I remembered to shake out my shoes for scorpions after having slept in the open forest the previous night. And how good the warm shower felt. I used up all the water from the small tank sitting on the roof.

Kabale had changed so much since my last visit. The years of Amin's tyranny and the virtual collapse of the economy left the once comfortable hotel a seedy shadow of

its former self. Half of the light bulbs were out downstairs and when you went to bed you were given a bulb for your room, which had to be returned to the desk when you came down for breakfast.

But I didn't have time to observe much. My thoughts were on Hanna, somewhere on the Uganda side of the Ruwenzori, and on Andries, among a gang who would snuff out his life in a moment, if they suspected that he had helped me to escape. But my worry wouldn't solve their problems. I had to get organized. The local branches of the banks couldn't help me. I would need to get through Kampala to Nairobi in order to get money to buy supplies, including a jeep. A bus to Kampala was expected in half an hour. But it hadn't run for the last two days. I asked the manager how much landrovers cost. He laughed. "If you mean new from the docks in Mombasa, you'd pay a million shillings, but you couldn't get it past all the gangs. If the soldiers didn't borrow it for use in their country, one of the gangs would just kill you before taking it. This country is run by 'magendo.'" "Magendo?" I repeated, not knowing that Swahili word. "Ndio," the manager said. "It just means a whole way of living using the black market and schemes to get money or food or petrol."

Chapter 18

The beat up bus did arrive an hour late, white cords showing through the rubber on some of its double tires. It would be a long ride to Kampala with the roads in such a state of deterioration. Although my body creaked from stiffness, the trip would give me time to think through my strategy for finding Hanna or—and my mind was not made up—letting Hanna go free. If finding her meant enslavement, I wanted no part of it. If resurrecting rumors about Africans and apes were to be the result, I would feel likewise.

My concentration was broken when we stopped to pick up a woman with a sick child. She offered the bus driver a stocky Munyoro, four pineapples, for her fare to wherever she was going. He took them and put them on his right between himself and the door and glared at the other passengers as if to say, “Don’t you tell. I just need food for my family.”

We stopped for a rest and for water from a stream that passed under the road. As the day wore on into afternoon, I was too jolted and jarred to try to think further and just sat and watched the cotton fields. We were now into Buganda and moving on Kampala. I had once done research on “mailo” land and the way the “saza” or country chiefs had organized Baganda society long before the Europeans arrived.

Twice we were stopped for military searches.

At the second checkpoint, we bought fried plantains from roadside vendors. The driver said it was only another twelve miles to Kampala. I got him to talk a little and he said he was taking the bus from Kampala to Entebbe for the night because it would be safer there. That was good news to me because I hoped to fly two hours from Uganda to Nairobi and not make the two day trip by road.

It was twilight before the driver had dropped his passengers in Kampala and started on the 19 miles to Entebbe. He drove fast to avoid the curfew and also because he was afraid of *kondos* who would simply kill us and steal the bus. Passing through a large road cut about halfway to Entebbe, I noticed a burned-out armored car. The driver explained that after the Libyans had landed at Entebbe in the last days of Amin, they had been loaded into buses and came down this narrow highway leading out of the Entebbe peninsula. A Libyan armored car preceded the 300 soldiers on the buses, and the whole convoy was caught in a classic trap as Tanzanian troops and Ugandan irregulars poured down automatic fire from both sides of the deep defile. A few of the Libyans escaped into the countryside and, he laughed, they didn't even know what country they were in when captured.

I spent the night at the old administration building where the Israelis had made their brilliant raid. Some of the hijacked passengers, had been crowded into this very room. The Israeli attack failed to find Amin only a mile away when he jumped out of a second story window and landed in a flower garden. I had trouble sleeping despite the long journey. Tomorrow, I would be in Nairobi and be able to put something together. My thoughts, as I lay my head on the canvas pillow, were first of Hanna. How was she managing for food? She had found the red berries for me. She was bright and could do what the gorillas in the troop did for food. I couldn't worry about

whether she would be able to digest the rougher materials she might find after all the "human" food that van Straeten had raised her on.

* * *

I woke at 5:00 a.m., my head cleared from the confusion of the rushed days and my body refreshed. But there was no decrease of my ticking anxiety over Hanna. I had to face up to my next move. How to get back to her? How to save her? Little did I know that a *modus operandi* was near at hand.

During breakfast I watched the first plane from Kenya land, a high wing Fokker prop job. It was going on to Fort Portal in western Uganda after lengthy clearances. The passengers gradually cleared emigration and came to the dining room for coffee. One was reading that morning's edition of *The Nation* from Nairobi. Van Straeten's secret was featured on the back page:

Half-Human Gorilla Sighted on Ruwenzori

The story went on to say that a group of Hutu rebels were seeking to capture this exotic creature-person. The paper reported a rumor that a Saudi prince, who saw the hand of Allah in the creation, was offering \$8,000,000. Film crews were reported en route from Europe and the States.

But on balance the story appeared less credible than many like it about Yetis, Big Foot, and even the Loch Ness monster. Professors at the University of Nairobi scoffed at the story.

However, there were believers or at least those willing to take a chance that the report was true. It didn't take me ten minutes to discover that passengers going to western Uganda were also involved in the search for Hanna, although they naturally didn't know her name.

The leader was an animal dealer from Nairobi named Muhammad Sheikh. There were also a Kikuyu head of the National Parks Board, a member of Parliament from the Teita Hills, and a young woman journalist they called "Birdie."

When I said that I had stayed with van Straeten at his cabin and inquired about him, the Park man said:

"We think he is alive and with the Hutu group. We aren't sure whether he is with the Hutu in their desire to capture or kill the beast [I shuddered] or is a captive."

I dissimulated and said nothing about Andries helping me to escape. The Asian seemed out for a quick buck but I couldn't figure out the motivations of the others in the incongruous group. When the loudspeaker called for their flight, the Asian spoke decisively:

"You obviously know about the whole setup. Will you come with us? I'll pay you \$200 a day in advance." The money was no factor in my decision. They obviously had plenty of money and authority. They would have vehicles one way or another. I was unorganized and would have to cable for funds and then wait before I could do anything. My irrational thought was why I hadn't tried to buy some clean clothes when we passed through Kampala the night before. But there wasn't much doubt about my answer:

"I'll be glad to join you."

Instantly, my anxiety stopped ticking. The decision had cleared my head like a strong dose of smelling salts. In a few moments I had obtained most of what I had intended to go to Nairobi to find.

The Fokker is built for getting in and out of small fields, so we rose steeply not a third of the way down the Entebbe runway. Actually, the runway has a hump in the middle so we took off going uphill. The windows were wide and with the high wing they give an unobstructed view below. The runway was a narrowing ribbon before the swampy

shores of Lake Victoria appeared. From a few thousand feet you can see that Entebbe, which means “seat” in the vernacular, is at the end of a peninsula surrounded by Lake Victoria. I could see the narrow asphalt road that winds some twentysix miles to Kampala, and tried to recall all the times and in what different circumstances I had driven it over the last thirty years.

One could count the seven hills which, like Rome, Kampala was built on. These were the green hills of Africa that Ernest Hemingway had titled his book after. Most of Africa is brown, yellow, and often red from the laterite soils. Very little is green hills, although the title of the book contributes to the false image of Africa as jungle. As we flew west I saw some heavily wooded hills but there was no jungle.

Settling back in my seat, I began to think about whom I might have contacted for help had I gone to Nairobi. On my last stopover there I had visited Beryl Markham; she was the one person with whom I felt I could discuss the whole issue of Andries’ family.

Beryl was a remarkable woman. She was the first person to fly the Atlantic solo from east to west—and she did it at a time when women’s accomplishments were little appreciated. When her book *West is the Night* was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1946, Ernest Hemingway hailed her talents with reputedly post-orgasmic hyperbole as “deserving of a Nobel Prize in literature.” She received a new burst of popular acclaim in 1983 when the North Point Press in California reissued the book to favorable reviews. However, the rebirth of her account led to the assertion in British literary circles that it was written largely by one of her lovers in Kenya and was far superior to her short stories.

After a fling in Britain, Beryl returned to Kenya and became a champion breeder and racer of thoroughbreds. The

horses do well in the cool, tse-tse-free highlands. Because she knew a lot about breeding, I wanted to discuss various possibilities with her, including what would likely happen with another van Straeten generation that was three-fourths human.

Unfortunately, Beryl had become an alcoholic. Mutual friends warned me to be sure to visit her before 11:00 a.m., by which time she would be stuporous. So, on a sunny morning, I drove out to Karen, the suburb named for Beryl's arch enemy Karen Blixen. I found Beryl seated on a white divan, quite perky, but faded like a curtain left hanging in the tropical sun for years. Her visage, so veiled by age and ravaged by drink, contrasted with the photograph of her that adorned a side table. It showed a beautiful smiling face framed by an old-fashioned leather flying cap, with flaps over the ears. As I recall blonde-white curls peeked out from the cap.

Beryl was the only person I hinted to about Andries' family. She listened attentively as I talked. But she wagged her head from side to side negatively as she kept sipping pure Gilbeys. Her initial comment was, "Well, you know, Ned, I never tried an animal. Wonder what it would be like with a chimp." Perhaps she was trying to shock me; perhaps it was an attempt at bravado, to assure herself that life still held new adventures. No matter. She didn't so much disbelieve me as she failed to take in what I had suggested. She pointed out that thoroughbreds have changed vastly through selective breeding, but that change would take much longer with gorillas because the human-gorilla breeding period was much longer than that of the horse.

She seemed somewhat skeptical about my comments on speech. Fluent in Kiswahili, she questioned me: "How do you think a half-gorilla half-human would speak? I had to confess that I couldn't reproduce them very well because my own knowledge of the language was so limited, and

I've never had an ear for pronunciation. She took this as a coverup for a fabricated story.

In a burst of unrealistic optimism, Beryl asked if I would take her to see "any" gorilla children. I said, "Yes," but it didn't mean anything to her. She was clearly in no condition for travel, let alone undertake arduous hiking in the mountains.

On balance, I was disappointed with her answers to my questions. Thinking a compliment might help her to focus on the breeding issue, I told her what Orson Welles had once told me—that it was extraordinary that Kenya had produced three brilliant women writers: Karen Blixen, Elspeth Huxley, and Beryl Markham.

"When was that?" she challenged.

"One afternoon in the Hollywood Hills," I replied. After a PEN meeting, Florence Feiler, who was Blixen's literary agent, suggested seeing Orson Welles to ask for an article on Blixen. [Years later, I actually published Welles' glowing account of the Danish writer.]

My gambit failed. Hearing Blixen's name set Beryl off: "That bitch! I had every one of her lovers before she did, including that tall aviator. I taught him a lot about flying and sex."

Jealousy oozed out of her along with faint drops of perspiration from the gin. With a half shake of her shoulders that seemed to convey contempt, she added, "That Danish bitch never even fucked the blacks. She never knew what she missed. Some magnificent ones. Especially among the Kalenjin and Masaai." Her words and her tone reflected the racist attitudes of her era.

It was tragic to watch someone who had achieved so much and who had been so exuberant most of her life drowning herself in Mr. Gilbeys' clear liquid. She was in no condition to give me advice. Before leaving, I quoted her own words to her: "Africa is of an ancient age and many

of her people are as venerable and chaste as truth.”

“Yes,” she said, her hand shaking as she took a sip, “and it is still true.”

Sitting on the plane as it skimmed over the greenery of western Uganda, I recalled her words with a poignant sadness. The pilot throttled back on his power and brought my reverie to an end. I realized that, by thinking about Beryl Markham, I had subconsciously kept myself from brooding and worrying about Hanna. As a further distraction, I turned to my seatmate, a small, intelligent looking man named Mathu. Was he any relation to the Kiukyu politician a generation ago?

He beamed, “Eliud Mathu was my uncle.”

All over Africa you strike a positive response when you ask about family. If the average African ever gets much real money, the genealogists are going to make fortunes.

Mr. Mathu seemed to have mixed emotions about the expedition I had so precipitously joined with only the clothes on my back and the toilet articles I had borrowed in Entebbe. Apparently the excitement over the existence of a half-human gorilla dominated his thinking. He said that there wasn't much reaction from the world press.

This didn't surprise me. First of all, most reputable scientists would say that such a cross was impossible. And Africa is always full of wild stories. A recent one had some tribesmen reporting a dinosaur in the middle of the Central African Republic. An expedition actually went to investigate.

Some years before I had looked into another story about a tribe in Mozambique that had webbed feet and could run like the wind and climb trees. When that was tracked down, I did find a small group of people in a sub-tribe who had a recessive gene. Through intermarriage it led to a hundred people having a genetic defect in which these “Vamba” people had their toes webbed together. But far

from making them fly like the wind and climb trees, it was a physical disadvantage. Still, this little kernel of truth has been exaggerated by racist authors to try to prove that Africans are like apes.

Conversation was difficult and I looked forward to being on the ground and finding out just what kind of people I had fallen in with. The plane seemed to be at 8,000 feet heading straight into the side of the sheer mountain range. It reminded me of being in a small canoe up close to the steep, black, steel hull of a super tanker. By looking up, I could see the snow like a plimsoll line, at about 14,000, or several thousand below the highest peaks.

Looking down, I spotted the little town of Fort Portal, named for a colonialist of the last century. First, the pilot buzzed low over the control tower. Mr. Sheikh, who had been about as talkative as a giraffe, let out a muffled cry that seemed to have an Indian accent to it, as the plane went into a steep bank. The pretty Kamba stewardess braced herself on the seat backs as she made her way to him with an airbag.

My seatmate from sophisticated Kenya looked puzzled. So I explained to Mr. Mathu that Fort Portal was such a small airport that you had to buzz the tower so that the traffic controller would send out a jeep to drive the cattle off the runway.

After circling north of the runway while the bovine problems were removed, the pilot skillfully set us down and killed his engine in front of the small control tower.

There were two army landrovers. The airline had made some arrangements. How I didn't know. There was no time to consider internal Uganda politics as the men and the lone woman chattered excitedly about what they thought they might shortly see. I didn't want to reveal the extent of my knowledge or of how far we might be from what they clearly thought would be the event of their lifetimes.

At the small reception room, I sat down with the Parks man to study his detailed maps. He clearly wanted to go to where it was thought van Straeten's cabin was located. I didn't want him to follow my thought processes so I asked if he could let me study the maps alone for a few minutes. He looked a little strangely at me, but realized that he needed to bargain for some supplies.

The map was excellent. I could pinpoint more or less where the cabin was and the general direction Hanna and I had moved after the shooting. It was my guess that if she had stayed with the wild gorillas, she wouldn't have moved far.

My thoughts were as crystal clear on one question as they were inchoate on another. My group must find Hanna first. The Hutu must not be able to exploit her—by capture and exhibition or by cutting off her extremities to use as sexual charms.

But what to do if my group found the wild gorillas and Hanna? There seemed little hope of dissuading them from their mission. I could only go along. But could I mislead them? Not if it meant that the Hutu would find Hanna first. So I was committed to try to find her. But what then? Could I be part of putting her behind bars? Never. My teeth ground as I dismissed the thought.

Back to the map, it was easy to trace the best route from the Uganda side. We would be coming into my target point from the north and east. The Hutu didn't know that Hanna had been with me when I had diverted them. So they would probably be heading for the cabin and moving on a trail from the southeast. But my group must get there first. I stood up ready to move out.

Chapter 19

As we started out in a convoy of two landrovers, winding up the escarpment, the equatorial sun blazed. The pale woman reporter from *The Times* in London was dressed in a sleeveless top tucked into jeans. Her arms had turned from pink to fiery red by the time we stopped for lunch at noon. In the cool shadow of a podocarpus, the reporter began to shiver. Mathu convinced her that she wasn't coming down with malaria as we finished off the canned ham and washed it down with Tusker beer.

At one o'clock we left the red murrum road and turned onto a ranger's trail. Mathu was sitting in back with me, but he half rose and steadied himself with the roll-bar as he pointed out to the reporter the various kinds of dung left by animals on the trail. The landrover's wheels disintegrated a huge pile of dried elephant leavings and the cloud of dust made her fastidiously use a tissue to wipe her face, but it was obviously too painful to touch her arms. The people in the last landrover complained about our dust, but we didn't describe its composition to them.

After an hour on the ranger trail, we stopped to study the maps. From here on we would have to walk. Studying the map, I could easily pick up from the tightly packed contour lines the deep ravine that Hanna and I had crossed in our escape from the Hutu. Estimating where we met the gorillas, I measured the distance with my index finger from

the scale at the bottom of the map. We couldn't be more than four or possibly five miles from where Hanna had joined the gorillas.

Had she stayed with them? Had she doubled back on our path in an effort to find me? My emotions were mixed. The touching thought of her having searched for me clashed with my fear that if she could read the trail it would have led her into the hands of the advancing Hutus.

I took the lead now, walking fast but listening intently. There was too much noise behind me from inexperienced people who couldn't track silently. The sunburned woman kept trying to walk abreast and question me in her cockney accent. Finally, really annoyed, I exploded.

"Will you please get the hell back or wait here until we return. You make too damn much noise with your talking and your walking. Please. I damn well insist."

I stopped, waiting for her to retreat. A look of fright crossed her face as though she might really be left alone on the mountain. Mathu took her hand and she started toward the rear. I turned to the Indian, who had said nothing but who was as noisy in his movements as the reporter.

"Please, stay at least fifty yards back so I can listen."

It was fortunate, as it turned out, that I had given myself that lead distance from the pack. About a mile farther on, I thought I saw something large moving at an angle to me. As I began to run I realized that I was momentarily out of sight of my followers. Running, I saw glimpses of something blue in among the trees. Blue is relatively rare in nature except for the sea and the sky. It stood out much more here on the Ruwenzori than yellow or brown or red would have done amid the black and green.

My legs ached. Sweat poured off me. I accelerated my pace. The figure was a man, loping at a steady gait. Trees kept interrupting my vision like the flickering of telegraph

poles seen from a speeding train.

It was Andries!

I started to cry out. Then I stopped lest my followers hear me.

Was he alone?

I could see him clearly now as I gained ground at an angle. No one seemed to be following him.

Then he must have heard me because he stopped and looked in my direction. I waved but he didn't see me in the dense cover. He was about a hundred yards away and slightly above me on a slope to my right.

I began to run as fast as I could, without taking normal care where I put my feet. Finally, I closed the gap to fifty yards and called softly.

"Andries, Andries. Je suis ici."

I thought he would pick out his name and the French words most readily.

He heard me. The way he turned to search for the voice seemed to blend hope and apprehension. I kept running. Suddenly his head lifted as he saw me below, coming up the slope. Twenty feet away, I saw him look over my shoulder. The thought flashed through my mind that surely none of the party could be in sight. Then we met and threw our arms around each other. I felt the sweat on his forehead drip on my cheek. Holding him made him more really alive than just seeing him had. I felt an almost orgasmic release of tension.

We stood gently shaking each other for what seemed twenty seconds of infinity. But the stillness of the forest cried out danger.

I blurted out the essentials. Then he explained:

"Nedt, the Hutus have stopped to make a camp and are watching the nest that a gorilla troop must have made last night. Where could my daughter be?"

It was the first time I had heard him say "daughter" as

opposed to "children."

"We are near where I left her. If she or the gorillas heard noises and were afraid, wouldn't they move up the mountain as long as they were still in the forest?"

"Yes!" Van Straeten bit off the word, paused then continued, "Nedt, we must reach her first."

"Yes, my Nairobi Parks people have dart guns to drug Hanna if they find her."

A pained look crossed his face, while his teeth ground before he told me, "The Hutus have a net of manila hemp they want to throw over her. They think that I will entice her so that they can capture her. I'd kill myself first."

His vehemence seemed justified. There was no time to talk more. My group could not be far behind now, and the Hutus could be looking for Andries.

"Up," he said, and took the lead. He walked swiftly. In our brief conversation, I had got my breath back. But still, at 9,000 feet, I found it hard to keep up with him. All his years of acclimatization more than made up for the age difference.

About half an hour later, we saw a large silverback. If Andries had seen the silverback that called to Hanna, he would have remembered, but I lacked his ability to recall gorillas as separate individuals.

"Is it the one?" he whispered.

"I don't know," I whispered back apologetically.

"We must find out," he murmured as he started ahead. We had moved perhaps thirty yards when the silverback spotted us. Immediately the huge gorilla began an aggressive display. He stood upright and began to pound his chest and make deep bass sounds.

Andries answered with guttural "Hoo hoos," but put his head down as a submissive gesture.

Finally, the silverback dropped down to his normal quadruped position.

Cautiously we approached him, Andries in the lead.

Andries stopped ten yards away.

The gorilla stared at us, neither frightened nor aggressive. I wondered if Andries recognized him, or vice versa.

Andries put a hand out behind him, still looking directly at the silverback, and pushed me gently away. I began to retreat in small backward steps. Andries followed. When we were back in the undergrowth away from the clearing where the silverback remained motionless watching us, Andries turned and, taking the lead, said we must go around.

Conversation was difficult because of the gurgling of one of the many glacier-fed streams. But when we entered an alpine meadow Andries let out a muffled cry.

“Hanna!”

There she was, drinking from the stream. She let the water in her cupped hands fall through them as she turned at the sound of her father’s voice. She ran toward us. As she flew into Andries arms, I was conscious of her nudity or, rather, of how strange we must seem with clothes on. But Hanna appeared too excited to notice.

“Havari,” she asked her father as she pulled back from the embrace, “Havari, Nedt,” she nodded.

“Mzuri,” Andries answered.

Hanna looked tired and ill. No wonder she asked Andries, “Wapi chagula?”

Of course, I realized, she was hungry. I pulled out a chocolate bar Mathu had given me. I noted Hanna’s dexterity as her fingers tore off the wrappers. She was a lot more human to me than she was gorilla. She was just another person—someone I cared for. Someone who needed help.

She ate the chocolate in one bite.

“Asante sana, Nedt,” she managed to say as she was still chewing. Her words were followed immediately by shouts below us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ned Munger is a world-recognized authority on Africa. He has traveled there eighty-six times since 1947, visiting all the countries.

He was president of the L. S. B. Leakey Foundation for fourteen years, which pioneered the study of early man in a three-pronged approach: archaeological fossils with the Leakeys, Johanson, and White; higher primates with Goodall, Fossey, and Galdikas; and hunter-gathers with Devore and others.

Dr. Munger launched the Baldwin Fellowships, which helped forty Africans obtain advanced degrees in archaeology. Since 1985, he has been president of the Cape of Good Hope Foundation, which has sent over one million dollars worth of books to largely black universities in southern Africa.

Dr. Munger received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1951 and a Distinguished Alumni Award in 1993. He is Professor Emeritus of African Studies at the California Institute of Technology. He was the first Fulbright Scholar to Africa, a founder-trustee of the African Studies Association, and the U.S.—South African Leader Program, a board member of the Institute of Race Relations in South Africa, and a board member of the Pasadena NAACP.



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