THE TWISTED FOOT

HE PICKED UP THE FALLEN SPEAR AND HELD IT READY (*page 6*)

THE TWISTED FOOT

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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TO MY NEPHEW

SAMUEL RIDEOUT WEBBER

FOR THE SAKE OF MANY DAYS OUTDOORS, WHEN
WE SHOT AND TRAMPED THROUGH THE WOODS,
FISHED THE FLOWAGE, SWAM IN NASH'S LAKE,
OR CHOPPED THE CHRISTMAS TREES THAT
SHOWERED US WITH SNOW

H. M. R.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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THE TWISTED FOOT

CHAPTER I

THE SILVER LOCKET

THE captain's biscuits, a Huntley and Palmer tin, were slung — high beyond reach of white ants or more nauseous vermin — on a lanyard made fast to the awning stanchion. There they swung dimly, beside a bunch of ripe bananas, in the darkest part of the boat-deck. If Agapito, the *mestizo* steward, had stayed awake long enough to coil up loose ends . . . but a tale was hanging by that slender cord, along with the captain's biscuits.

Into this tale, David Bowman plunged head first over the side, through the unguarded gap astern of the long-boat. The rotten cord snapped from his ankle, and he fell whirling, in a shock of surprise and blind rage. A long time, it seemed, he fought and choked in the cool darkness under the ocean. Then, as he shouted between air and water, his streaming eyes, blinded and stung with salt, cleared to show him the golden jet of phosphorus squirting from his mouth, the unbroken swell of the tropic sea like black oil moving under

the gray mist of moonshine, and the Santo Niño's lights already far ahead.

"Wait!" he sputtered peevishly; then shouted, "Ahoy, Santo Niño! Help! Man overboard!"

Midnight, on the Sulu Sea, was astonishingly wide and still. The swimmer heard only a muffled, mechanical panting which, from that black bulk ahead, reached him fainter and thinner, like the low-trailing stink and dropping cinders of Mitsui coal. No other sound; no other stir, he thought, but the breath of the departing ship.

He choked again, coughed, and at last, catching a mouthful of air without water, shouted. His voice rose frail and angry, an atom of sound.

"No use," he perceived, in a flash of lonely terror. The Tagalog crew were all asleep, of course; and of course his friend, the captain, dozed in a chair by the wheelhouse, and wondered what kept him aft so long, when the two good-night drinks waited. Now they would wait forever. His drink would be the last bitter draught of brine and darkness.

He cried out against that fate. The two dull lanterns faded more and more through the smoke, above the hoary wake of phosphorus. No one heard.

A moment ago, when his foot caught in the slatternly coils of the lanyard, he had been walking forward, prosperous, his head full of important

things to do, up north, in Manila. Now remained only two great unrealities, — a swimmer, and the moonlit ocean. The act of staying afloat became so heavy, all at once, that he would have flung up both arms and let go, had not a fragment from an unknown book haunted him, ringing like a sunken bell: —

> " the bubbling cry
> Of some strong swimmer in his agony."

"That means — me!" He lashed out in dismay; but the lights grew less, the black shape lowered and shrank upon the heaving, liquid foundation of his sight. Only the unknown line, a dread stimulus, kept him at work above water. "Some strong swimmer," — that was all he or his final contest meant, to the tropic ocean and the tropic moon.

He groaned. Anguish of the spirit, it might have been; but before the sound went wide and was lost, he knew it for anguish of the body. "Swimming too hard: ease up," commanded some unconquerable secret part of him; and obeying, his arms and legs no longer jerked out violently, but began to move with the strong, deliberate ease of habit. Presently, by the same impulse, he found his fingers tugging stubbornly, under water, at buttons and belt. All day, by a lucky chance, he had gone about the decks bare-

foot; and now, at last, he managed to wriggle and tear loose from the leaden wrappings of jacket and trousers. He swam naked, as light — by contrast — as a floating sea-gull.

Behind him, for the time of a few strokes, the swollen folds of white drill glistened in the moonlight, like ghostly spirals of a water-snake.

Before him, the Santo Niño had already faded to a pair of twinkling points, often smudged out by the tiny black squall of smoke. Beyond these, on his right hand, stretched a continuous gray vapor, the fusion of sky and sea in the moonlight; but, on his left hand, the distant contours of island mountains floated like darker vapors, almost equally dissolved. Land — shore: they were too far off, and swept by strong, impassable currents; yet toward these he set his face, and, without plan or hope, began doggedly to swim.

"As long as I can, anyhow," he grumbled.

After a weary time, the ship's lights were gone, and he moved alone, interminably, through the wide ocean. Whenever he turned on his back to float and rest, the great moon, straight overhead, surprised him by her pale splendor. After a breathing-space it made him dizzy to watch her, for sky and sea grew topsy-turvy, as though the ceiling of the world had become the floor, and he himself swung aloft, looking deeply down at the

inverted orb. He rolled over quickly and struck out, to escape the vertigo of space.

Then, through the slow drift of hours, he found the moon lowering into his range of sight. Her path began to glimmer on the glossy, heaving surface ahead. The long mist of western mountains gradually took on edge, and blackness, and substance.

"I can't make 'em." He thought vaguely, and with effort; for the growing chill, and the dull pain of weariness which clogged his muscles, now began to steal through his brain.

"How long, do you suppose?" he asked himself, aloud. The water had no more buoyancy. The path of the moon faded. Over the flat void settled a pale smoke, pink and gray. He noted the changes with profound apathy, wondering only if he should be afloat at sunrise.

All at once he spun bolt upright, treading water so hard as to lift himself out, breast-high.

"*Anito!*" said a guttural voice, close by. "*Anito!*"

The sound ran through him like a fiery shock; for the voice had spoken almost in his ear, out of the lonely mist.

A long, slim, black shape bore down slowly from the right. It focused as the body, mast, and outriggers of a sailing *banca*, in the stern of which huddled the figures of two men.

"Ahoy! *Hombre!*" called David, suddenly limp and sick at the vision of this godsend. Finding no words but English, he waved his hand. Two faces peered at him through the obscurity, — gray faces, strangely drawn and puckered. The hard, shrewd eyes met his, and stared, large and wild, in the milky light of the sea dawn.

"Here!" he cried, choking, and beckoned feebly. "Help! *Sigue!*"

The paler of the two men laughed softly. Neither stirred. The slender boat continued to drift by.

Spent as he was, and bitter cold to the marrow, David burned inwardly with sudden anger. Cleaving the water with a powerful overhand stroke, he raced up the low, smooth slope of the intervening swell, dove beneath the outrigger, and spluttering, rose to clutch the heavy gunwale. Still blind with salt, he saw dimly, in amazement, a scowling bronze face and a shock of long, yellow hair below some uplifted weapon. With a sob of rage, he contrived to grip one bare ankle and to jerk. A brown, tattooed body fell splashing over the opposite gunwale, in the same instant that he hoisted himself on board, picked up the fallen spear, and held it ready.

The paler man, still squatting aft, made no effort to help or hinder. Naked, slim yet beautifully muscular, he smiled with keen, cynical brown

eyes, and waved his shapely hand in a sign rather of command than of surrender. In the luminous mist his body shone light-golden, his face stood forth bold and suave, barbaric and cruelly sophisticated. His hair, the coarse black hair of Asia, was cropped in the fashion of Europe.

"You speak English," said David confidently.

The fellow eyed him without blinking, and again, impatiently yet gracefully, signaled for him to drop the spear.

The man who had toppled overboard now reared his strange blond head at the stern, and, climbing in, crouched behind his master, over whose shoulder he peered with a frightened, savage face. From his broad chest up to his powerful shoulders, there spread in greenish-blue tattooing, like a pair of ferns drooping asunder, the Bontoc *chak-lag* which marks him who has taken a human head in war.

"*Anito!*" he mumbled, shaking his yellow mop, and staring at the white man from the sea.

"*Anito?* No, I am not a ghost," said David, in such fragments as he could recall of the northern hillmen's speech. "What are you doing so far south?"

The pale man turned, and over his shoulder murmured to the bronze head-hunter. Then both, as though agreed, sullenly watched the intruder. Whether or not they had understood,

they were plainly determined not to speak. And at last, all words proving useless, David lay back, exhausted yet wary, a third partner in the hostile silence.

Tropic day came quickly. The red sun snapped the taut line of the eastern sea, like a coal burning a cord. All about the *banca* thin vapors drifted westward; and from the wet, feverous green of island heights in the west, long gray lines spread raggedly, steaming like smoke above rifle-pits. Soon it was broad morning, and heat quivered round the boat, which lay dead as a log, narrow and greasy black, like a floating crocodile.

This heat, at first, was grateful to the naked swimmer, whose fingers were cold, white, and puckered, as though parboiled. At last, however, he roused in some anxiety.

"I'll get baked alive here," he thought. Scanning the bottom of the *banca*, he saw nothing which could serve as garment. The only cargo lay in a small heap astern, before the veined, muscular legs of the yellow man: a narrow Tinglayan shield of wood, stained a dull red, five-pronged, laced with *bejuco*, and carved in lines as graceful as those of a violin; some wooden "pig-pails" full of *camotes* and rice; two gourds, two wooden spoons, and a Samoki bowl of clay; a few hands of bananas; and a sheaf of barbed iron spear-blades, which must have come all the way from

the four smithies of Baliwang. Food and weapons there were, then, but no clothing. David turned to look forward, in hope to discover some bit of matting.

Here also, however, he found nothing. He was about to give over, and settle himself for a day of torment, when just behind the step of the mast he spied a dirty bundle. Spear in hand, he crawled toward this, and to his great joy hauled up a sopping mass of heavy cloth. He unrolled the precious wad; then eyed it in stupid wonder.

It was a khaki shooting-jacket.

He turned a swift glance aft — a glance full of anger and suspicion.

"Where did you get this?" he cried.

The two strange companions paid back his look with ferocious interest; but neither answered. The black-haired man with the yellow body smiled in scorn, scooped out a handful of rice from the Samoki bowl, and began to eat.

David, fingering the soaked and tangled pockets, found them empty, except for a tag of white cotton that, sewn loosely inside the breast, bore a few scratches of ink — the Chinese tailor's ticket. There seemed to be nothing else. The jacket, though badly stained and crumpled, was of a smart enough cut, and too new to have been thrown or given away. A strange bit of white man's world, the tawny cloth seemed to have no

sense or meaning, there in the dugout. One fact alone was certain: it would have to be dried.

He was spreading it, when he felt in a secondary inner pouch, like a match-pocket, something thin, flat, and hard. With difficulty he found the opening, and drew out between finger and thumb a small, shining object. At the first glint of this in the sunlight, a hoarse cry sounded from the stern.

"*Anito!*" The dark barbarian crouched behind his master in a sudden fit of alarm. His brown eyes stared as though the bit of metal in David's hand was about to explode; and on his dark forehead an old scar, of battle or of eczema, turned to a patch of greasy mercury. The other man glanced up, frowned, and bent philosophically to his rice.

Next moment, David had forgotten them both. The thin silver locket lay open in a hand that trembled. It was as if a voice from home had spoken, as if a face which he had known and yet sought all his life, had leaped out of a dream to confront him. By the sound, he must have cried aloud; and now he sat staring, without thought of past danger or present incongruity.

The photograph, though discolored at the edge by the moisture of hot climates, showed in the centre the clear face of a girl, clean-bred, high-spirited, whose eyes met his directly, with a look

at once friendly and whimsical. He had never seen her before; they might have known each other through and through.

A grating sound made him look up quickly. Past the calf of the yellow man's leg the furtive hand of the savage whipped back a loose spear-blade from the bundle, then flashed aloft, poised, and threw. The blade came flying like a dart. David had barely time to whirl up the folds of the jacket, from which the steel fell clattering at his feet. He caught up his own spear, came aft in a single leap, and confiscated the remaining blades.

When he had tossed them forward beside the locket, he laughed. Something had brought him luck and gayety.

"You chaps lose your chow for that," he chuckled; and seizing their supply of bananas and rice, crawled back to his former station.

The *banca*, meantime, had begun to glide southward in a strong current before a light breeze. Round her the ocean glared. All day without a word the three men saw the far-off hills, high, bold curves of green volcanic island, wheel astern in drowsy procession, palm fronds, on trunks invisible in the distance, showing above each crest like many bombs of foliage bursting in mid-air. David found that day endless. Once he crawled aft to seize a gourd of water. But afterward he recalled neither thirst nor heat, nor the unearthly

solitude and silence in the crowded boat; only the insatiate wonder as he studied his picture in the locket.

No picture, it may be, had ever so outlandish an adorer as this young man, bare-legged, his body cramped in a jacket far too tight, and his head helmeted in a wooden bucket. Near by, a tattooed warrior, using a white pebble and his thumb for forceps, tugged out bristles of beard from savage cheeks. But David saw only the girl's face, half pitying, half mocking him, and always looking straight out, with ghostly directness, from the dusk and limbo of the stained photograph.

The wide glory of sunset at last burned out; the ocean lay black and velvety under the stars; and a cool wind out of the tropic night swept the lonely craft on toward the Southern Cross, with a faint, blending rustle of sail and of water.

It was now that David fathomed the difficulty of his case. The enemy, his two rescuers, could sleep, turn about; but he must keep for himself all the watches of the night. By clinching his will he had thus far stayed awake; now, with darkness, the power of sleep laid its leaden mace upon him.

Time and again he shook himself out of oblivion, and sat upright. This became harder and heavier — at last, impossible. Somewhere in the night, he became aware that a vague form was

creeping toward him from the stern. With a bound, he woke and shouted: —

"Go back, there!"

Again his forces drooped. Again he slept, and again the prowler crept forward on hands and knees.

For the second time he drove the man back, sat up rigidly, fought with sleep. And then a sudden thought, a twinge of comprehension, came to his aid, and for the moment at least, held him wide awake.

Fingering the outline of the silver case, he watched the stars above his unknown course.

"What's the good?" he thought. "What's the good, even if I should find her?"

The impulse had come without reason, without control; he was jealous, beyond bound, of the owner of that jacket.

CHAPTER II

THE HUT IN THE PALMS: DAWN

BEFORE David knew that he had slept, a sudden pain woke him. Hard fingers dug into his throat, and a heavy, naked body struggled to pin him flat in the bottom of the boat. Shaggy hair brushed his face. Some one grunted. A hand was worming under his shoulders, to reach the spear-blades.

David heaved upward against the living weight. It forced him down again. The rings of his windpipe seemed broken in that grip. With the last of his strength he caught one sinewy finger, bent it back till it snapped, tore his throat loose, and, wrenching every muscle in one fierce rebound, sat up and flung off his panting assailant.

It was not yet dawn. In a roiled, aqueous light David saw the head-hunter rise, crawl aft, and crouch behind the pale steersman. He could almost see the two men watching him with steady malignity, and could hear them mutter, discussing earnestly but secretly.

From them, and from the long, glimmering strip on the eastern line, David turned suddenly, aware of a deep sound rushing along to starboard both far and near. Close at hand, the black ocean

broke in a running line of low surf, spectrally white in this last hour of darkness. It was a coral reef. Beyond it — as over a wall of snow — ran a dark, ragged fringe of land, so near that even in the gloom David could descry, vaguely, the topmost points and tatters of palm groves.

He gave a start; for through a gap in the shifting barrier of spray a feeble light wavered, uncertain as the first star at evening. He lost the gleam, watched for it, and either caught it once more or had strained his eyes into seeing what he so powerfully desired.

Turning toward his two enemies, he made signs, vehement and unmistakable, that they should head the boat into the gap. For answer, the pale man laughed, as cool and scornful as ever, and with a strong, graceful sweep of his arm, plainly declared that no boat could pass the long barrier of the surf.

But David was not to be denied. He was sick of his company; he cared nothing for the risk to them or to their boat; and the nearness of the beach, so instant and unheralded, gave him a great hunger for the land. He would set foot on that lighted coast, though the light came from a cannibal campfire.

"Won't you!" he cried. "I will for you!"

He wrested the paddle from the steersman, and fighting against a strong tide, swung the nose of

the *banca* toward the gap. In the darkness and twisting current, it was touch and go; but the slender craft, stung into life by the following waves, at last shot through the narrow gate, just as a shower of flying drops drenched her from stem to stern, as if in raging disappointment. With a final heave and downward slant, she ran smoothly into still water.

David let her run, and peered ahead. A little bay, a deep semicircle, lay quiet as a lagoon, strange, dreamy, and placid behind the thundering breakers. Now there was no mistake: a light, veiled yet ruddy, showed in the low blackness of the shore like the spread embers of a dying fire.

Suddenly, in delight, he slapped his bare thigh. Somewhere near the fire, through the far-spread hushing tumult of the surf, sounded the yapping of a dog. It was no whining pariah who scented them, but a good valiant little terrier.

"A white man's dog!" cried David in jubilation. "White man's, and no mistake! Here, you chaps, you can go straight — wherever you like. Here's where I get out."

He sounded with his paddle, which brought up in hard sand with half the blade to spare. Flinging overboard the loose bundle of iron points, he tucked the head-hunter's spear under his arm, lowered both legs into the cool water, straddled

the outrigger, and began to wade toward the light and the friendly barking.

When, after a few steps, he looked back, the two men had turned the *banca* and were paddling, half-distinguishable shapes, toward a broader gap which lay, pale and smooth, to the southeast. For a moment he stared after them.

"Of all the unaccountable blackguards!" he wondered. Why, among the mad things they had done, should they have grumbled when he slid overboard? "They seemed," he thought, "as anxious to have me stay, as they were before to get rid of me."

He would never know why; for the *banca*, a thin blade of intenser shadow, moved steadily off toward the ring of foam that slowly brightened against the east.

In shore, as he turned again and waded, the night still lay black. Though only knee deep, he was much farther from the beach than he had thought. Step after step brought him no nearer to dry ground, apparently, except that he could hear the barking dog more plainly, could see a bent bow of coral sand curve like a gray arc drawn in misty phosphorus under the black land. The light, still veiled, lay scattered and trembling before him, as on a forest pool. But this gradually shrank and receded; the oily, rancid smell of decaying cocoanuts stole out to his nostrils; and at

last, his wet feet caked with sand, he strode up the half-luminous coral beach toward a grove profoundly black and silent.

Some small white thing darted sniffing about his legs. He stooped.

"Hi, little dog!" he chuckled. A fox-terrier rubbed its cold, sharp nose along his shin, submitting to be petted. "Hi, little dog from home! Where 's your master?"

The terrier capered about him, withdrew coyly, yelped and capered again, to beckon him toward the light. Together the man and the dog climbed a low bank, and in the sudden chill of land mist, entered a labyrinth of palm trunks.

The light, David now saw, came ruddy through a kind of coarse mesh, as coals might glow inside a great basket. After stumbling toward it among the bewildering palms, he saw that it shone in tiny points of dull red through the plaited bamboo walls of a house.

Doors and windows were shut home, screened by the same woven splints, porous to the light. The whole interior of a room appeared in dim transparency, with black objects (whether of furniture or squatting men, David could not tell) striking through in broken outlines.

He leaned on his spear, and called aloud.

"Hallo! I say! Inside there!"

There was neither stir nor speech in the lighted

house. The terrier frisked up to the threshold, whined, and waited. Again David called, but only roused a bat which fluttered across the dim radiance and up into the lofty darkness of the grove. Whoever lived in that house was a heavy sleeper.

The black figures remained motionless. He slid the frail door aside, and stepped up into the room. It was empty, except for a smoky lamp that shone on a rough table, and for two long chairs, a yellow Chinese chest against the wall, and beside it a small iron trunk of the English pattern.

The terrier skipped across the room, through an open door, into further darkness. After the scratching of his paws there was no sound, not even the sound of breathing. David stood listening, at a loss. Then, taking the lamp, he followed where the dog had led, into a little room also bare, except for a bed on which the terrier already lay curled, asleep. No one else had slept there, for the sheet lay smooth over the matting, and the mosquito net hung festooned above.

The terrier opened one drowsy eye, blinked at the lamp, and finding himself unreproved, fell asleep once more. David laughed.

"You got what you wanted, old fellow." He looked about and listened, with no result. "I've half a mind to try that bed myself."

Instead, he returned to the other room, replaced

his lamp on the table, and stretched out in a long chair to wait. Nobody came. Through the open door he could hear the steady voice of the breakers far out on the reef, and could see, farther yet, the morning slowly diffuse the edge of ocean. His legs were cold and growing numb. But this did not matter, — nothing mattered.

It was still dark, the lamp still burned, when he woke, or rather stirred in a drunken lethargy of sleep and exhaustion. A light step sounded at the door, through which swung the tall body of a young man in white, barefooted, with trousers rolled above his knees, and a stick or club in his hand.

David, too drowsy to move or speak, saw the newcomer limp across the threshold, and stand, as though musing, in the little circle of lamplight. The young man's face was of a singular and winning beauty, — thin, sallow, and almost feminine in its lines, but with the lips of a commander, and with bright gray eyes, sad but quick, mournful but haughty. His blond head, close-cropped, had a curious, dangerous poise, lifted slightly, as though the man were ready to answer or strike. From kneecap to toes his legs were scarred with red water-sores.

"And live alone," said the stranger, in a tone of deep disgust. "'And live alone in the something glade!' What ass wrote that, I wonder?

Wish he were here once! I'd see he was fed up with that sort of thing. What rot!"

The voice was pleasant, though void of inflection, like that of a man grown used to thinking aloud. David got unsteadily upon his feet. At the sound of this movement, the man in white wheeled with an instant and shocking violence, flinging upward the object which David had taken to be a stick. In the lamplight it now shone surprisingly formidable — a short, heavy Mannlicher carbine.

For all his sudden start, the young man's handsome face had not altered by a line. His voice rose ready and brisk, with a kind of engaging insolence.

"Who the devil are you?" Then, unperturbed, as though there were plenty of time, he surveyed David from head to foot, lowered his gun, and with a look full of some new and unmitigated contempt, flung out another question, "And where did you get my shooting-jacket?"

Tired though he was, and befuddled with sleep, David roused as at a blow. No man had ever spoken to him in that vein, or fixed him with such a hateful stare.

"I fell overboard," he answered coldly, "night before last. Two men in a *banca* picked me up — at least, I made them. I landed here less than an hour ago. And as for your jacket, it was in the *banca*. I had to wear something."

"Quite so." The gray eyes watched him, very hard and bright. "Where *are* your two friends?"

"Gone, I hope," said David, with rising anger. "I never saw them before," he explained stiffly, giving back stare for stare. "And that's all I can tell you."

The young man in white slung his Mannlicher in the crook of his arm, and continued to regard David with a face of unbelief.

"You're a Yankee, aren't you?" he said curtly. "I've seen Yankee beachcombers — plenty — but never quite such a blighter as you, my friend."

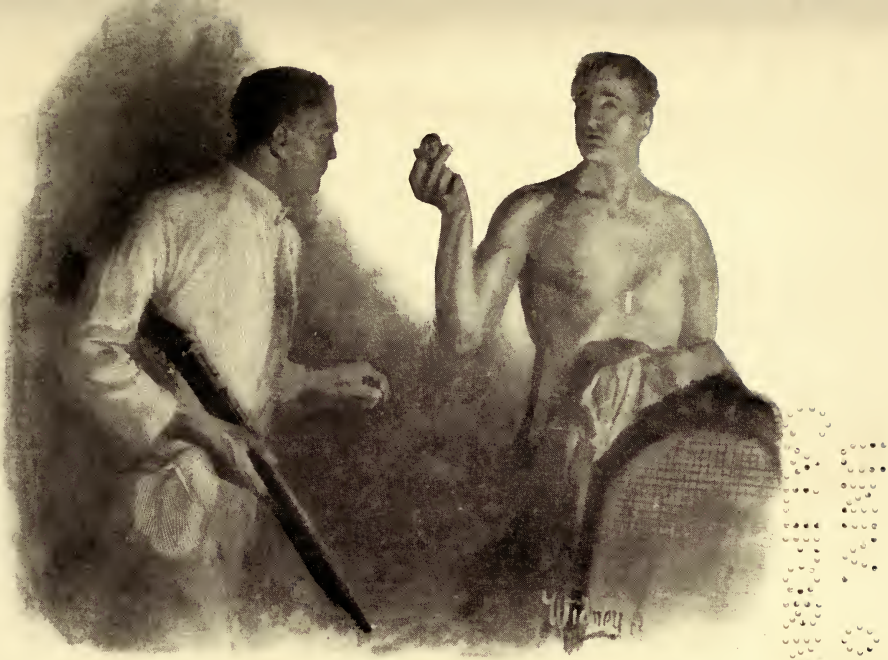
He stood back, significantly clear of the doorway.

"Tell your two black and tans," he went on; "that I carry this gun now. And by the way, keep the jacket. Now that you've worn it, I can easily do without."

For a moment David could not trust himself. Then, very pale, and with fingers missing the buttons, he ripped off the crumpled khaki, and stood forth naked.

"So can I," he replied, in a voice that shook. "I heard your dog barking on shore, and thought it was a white man's dog. A natural mistake, of course."

He stalked over to the Chinese chest, folded the khaki with great precision, and laid it down. As



YOU SEE, I DID N'T TAKE EVERYTHING

he did so, the locket struck forth a muffled click from the polished wood. Catching at the jacket once more, David plunged his hand inside. He was smiling queerly; this, he thought, was the sort of man who carried her picture.

"You see," he announced, holding up the thin silver case, "you see, I did n't take everything."

He spoke bitterly; and yet it was with a pang, a sense of loss, that he laid the locket on the table. He was giving up, it seemed, not only the bit of metal, but all that it contained and signified, forever. This scornful and godlike young fellow in white he had thus far only despised; now he hated, as he saw him limp quickly to the table, and laying down the carbine, snatch up the keepsake with boyish eagerness.

"Oh, I say," cried the stranger, opening the silver shell, and looking for a mere instant, but with evident satisfaction, at the picture. "I wondered — I would n't have missed that for a — a good deal more than I can tell you." He snapped the locket shut, and slipped it inside his tunic. "She's worth a few thousand of you and me."

The speaker remained motionless, with his arrogant young face bowed in a sudden fit of humility, his lean fingers drumming on the table, and his eyes fixed upon some memory half a world away.

This, to David, was worse than his plain

insolence. Jealousy, the same jealousy which had tormented him in the boat without right or cause or sense, had flamed up afresh, but now real and redoubled in the presence of this handsome, domineering rival. He longed to ask the man to come outside and fight; but that, of course, was absurd.

"I'm a fool," said David with conviction; and leaving the scornful stranger in possession, he turned toward the door, indifferent to a weariness that made him stagger.

Into the long aisle of slender palms, through which burned a vermilion sunrise, he went out, naked and alone.

CHAPTER III

THE HUT IN THE PALMS: NIGHT

He had taken but a few steps, and those dizzily, when the stranger's voice called after him, clear and commanding.

"Wait a bit!" The man in white stood looking down from the doorway, with an altered countenance. "We're all fools, if it comes to that. I mean to say, if you'd lived here by your lonesome, like me, till you felt ready to beat your dog for not answering — why, 't would have given *you* a start. A man with your face and build is no beachcomber, of course, and I beg pardon. You gave me something like a jump, you know, and your story *was* a bit of a shocker. Was n't it, now, to be fair?"

David stood there in doubt, sulking.

"I don't see anything in my story," he retorted, "to shock any man with an open mind, or" — he paused; then could not help adding — "or a clear conscience."

His rival in the doorway laughed — a pleasant, easy laugh, which was good to hear, and which gave his face a look of captivating mischief.

"Dear chap," he cried, "I have n't either, upon my word! My mind's a perfect nest of sus-

picions, as yours would be if —" He broke off and laughed again. "And conscience — mine's about as clear as mud. Come back here! I like the way you took this."

But David, not to be cast off and whistled back so easily, turned to go. On the flat path his feet stumbled as if among hummocks; his eyes were dry and leaden in their sockets; and round him the slim trunks swayed and blurred.

"Easy now!" coaxed a friendly voice. "Pins a little wobbly? Hold hard!" David could not tell whether he had fallen or not, but at all events he was now leaning on the Englishman's shoulder heavily, and somehow without compunction. "Steady a bit! Only a step or two —"

What followed David never could recall, except that the stubborn terrier would not get off the bed for a long time, that the glass of whisky was tepid and potent, and that his host, limping painfully about on scarred and mottled feet, was scolding himself in a queer soliloquy.

He remembered waking once, to see through a window the brightness of tropic day, the high palm-tops dazzling in silver spikes, as he rolled over into the infinite luxury of sleep.

It was evening when he came to himself, restored to normal spirits, but hollow with hunger. A candle burned in a little sconce of bamboo, and on a chair, close by, lay a cinglet, a suit of

white, and canvas pumps coated with fresh pipe-clay. He put them on with the gratitude of a cast-away redeemed.

In the next room, beside the lamp, his host sat opening a tin — a strangely menial task, it seemed, for a man with the face of a young emperor.

"Hallo!" he said cheerfully, and bent his shining head over the obstinate metal. "How are you? Feeling peckish?"

Through dinner he had little to say, but sat watching, with a quick smile whenever David spoke, a grave face between times, and always an air of studying his guest. A curry of tinned meat was followed by *gula* with fresh cocoanut milk; this, by more whisky and tepid water, and then a handful of Mrs. Middleton's cheroots. As soon as the blue wreaths of Burmah tobacco were coiling round the lamp, the two smokers leaned back and eyed each other across the little table, like friends.

"I see," drawled the stranger, "you're wondering. What, now?"

David smiled.

"Not for me to ask," he replied. "But if you don't mind, two things *did* seem odd—no servant, and that gun lying just where I can't see it."

His host laughed, the same engaging laugh

which robbed his face of all pride and all suspicion.

"A good eye you have there, old chap." He stooped, fished up the carbine from under foot, and stood it against the wall. "Habit, that's all. It was n't meant for you, I assure you. There it is — plain sight and equidistant, eh? Shows I trust you?"

"I did n't mean that," said David. "Here I sit, wearing your clothes, eating your food, smoking your tobacco. You might carry a cannon in your lap. But you invited the question."

The other nodded. His handsome face fell serious again as he continued very slowly: —

"I had a servant once, but the poor devil got frightened off — ran clear across the island at one go, I dare say, with his pigtail straight out behind him. I don't mind saying —"

The speaker paused, frowned slightly, then looked David square in the eye. "The fact is, I 'm in a funk, rather. If they only knew, they could bag me whenever they liked."

He leaned across, caught up the stubby Mannlicher, and poising it athwart between them, smiled oddly.

"I told you I trusted you. Here goes!" He ran the side-bolt back and forth rapidly. The deadly mechanism gave out a smart succession of clicks, very loud in the stillness of the little

room. "Not a cartridge in it, you see. What 's more," — he leaned forward and whispered, — "there's not one in the house. Finish! And I'm here alone."

Something in both voice and look gave suddenly to David an unaccountable sense of danger and solitude. He nodded, beginning to understand.

"Bluff?" he ventured.

"Quite so. Bluff." The Englishman patted the empty carbine as though fitting the word to it. "Bluff: that describes the past month of my life here."

He replaced the gun against the wall, and leaned back, smoking hard. Into the bare little cell of bamboo a silence seemed to pour, not only from the tall grove, but from the ocean beyond the reef, where the breakers no longer stirred. When the stranger spoke again, it was with the toneless voice and introverted gaze of a hermit.

"Fate, I suppose. I used to laugh at such nonsense, but nights like these, of late —" He smiled, and shook his head slowly. "I feel certain, somehow. They 're back in this neighborhood. This time, or soon. Yes, they 'll get me. Do you remember Hamlet and the sparrow? Fate 's the word. 'If it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all.'"

Once more the grove and the ocean poured

their stillness round the ring of lamplight. The night was close and hot, without a breath. David, watching the thin, resolute face poised as if to answer an invisible enemy, felt no longer any spark of resentment, but only a nameless pity. This owner of the locket, for all his arrogant beauty, was a man in trouble. In the silence, a shadow of mortality seemed to touch that shining head.

"Bukhing to myself, eh?" The gray eyes brightened, and returned to the present with a snap. "Beastly habit. It's your turn. — Do tell us the news outside. I haven't seen a paper since Christmas-time."

For the rest of that evening the two men talked of things from home, wars, politics, and small gossip from west of Suez — familiar matters, now far off and strange in this tropic night on the rim of a neglected island. Before midnight the stranger rose.

"Yawn away — don't hide it," he said. "We'll save some talk for morning. Bed's the best place for you. I've another cot in behind."

Bed seemed the best place to David, who fell asleep as soon as he had tucked in his netting.

Despite weariness he slept ill, tossing in dreams painfully vivid, swift, and interchangeable. He swam somewhere in an ugly darkness, toward a circle of ocean — lighted as if by a magic lantern

— which always receded, and into which jutted the black bows of a ship crowded high above with glistening yellow bodies of Chinamen. Suddenly, close beside him in the darkness, through an oval window of silver, appeared the face of the unknown girl whom he had surrendered, and who looked at him earnestly, as though, from a great distance and through unspeakable complexity, she were imploring him to help the other man. The black bow of the ship rushed between and cut them off, while a voice on deck called hoarsely, "*Anito!*" A ghost: the voice was right; she was no person, but an empty likeness blown down the wind of the world. Then the steward of the Santo Niño was fishing for him, trolling a log-line baited with biscuit.

And then David was awake. He had blown out his candle, so that the room lay stuffed with a darkness dense as India-rubber, except toward the window, where the heavy screen of palms shut out the moon, but flickered slowly and made a turbid stirring of the night. As he watched this, David found himself wondering who They might be. The vague pronoun haunted him drowsily, suggesting unseen and evil forces in ambush round the hut. Who were They?

Another question vexed him. What could this man be, at whose table he had eaten, yet whose name — as he now recalled with a start — was

totally unknown? Some trader in coprah; the rancid smell of cocoanut oil, pervading the grove, gave the most plausible answer.

As he lay thinking, a slight noise made him sit up in bed, suddenly but warily. Underneath the floor of the stilted hut something moved with a stealthy, intermittent motion. Whether beast or man, it crawled beneath his very bed, toward the next room. David had raised his netting, and was about to slip through to the floor, when from below, somewhere near their dinner-table, sounded a faint rapping of knuckles against the floor boards.

Silence followed. After an interval, the knuckles rapped again; and this time a brushing of bare feet told David that his host was roused. Then the man's voice murmured cautiously: —

"*Siapa?*"

From under the floor a softer voice replied: —

"*Ginawang.*"

The quick flare of a match, rubbed over cloth, was converted slowly into the shaking light of a candle, which passed at once behind a low screen. With a creak, a loose board or small trap-door was lifted. Through the woven wall, as through a basket, David saw the tall figure in white bend over the yawning square in the floor, from which, like a snake, a glistening brown arm rose, with fist clenched. White hand and dark

fist met. The fist opened, the hand closed; but not before there had dropped, from one to the other, a small green pellet as of crushed leaves. Then the arm sank from sight like a cobra into a conjurer's pot. The man in white lowered the board into place, crossed to the table, and stood looking down. Furtively as he had come, the visitor scuttled away underneath.

David lay back on his pillow, somewhat ashamed of his spying. They, whoever They were, had no part in the transaction. He, therefore, had none. This secret was the Englishman's affair. But though conscience might make a guest lie down and turn his head from the lighted wall, conscience could not put him to sleep. He lay for a long time, wondering.

Meanwhile, the man in the next room gave no sign of returning to bed; for his candle remained burning, dim behind the screen, and once or twice the creak of rattan showed that he must be sitting, awake and restless, by his table. After a time, the lid of the iron trunk closed gently, and the lock clicked. David heard the man sigh, heard the crackle of stiff paper, and presently caught a fragrant whiff of hot sealing-wax. Then in the same formidable stillness of the palm labyrinth and of the sea, a pen began to scratch like a lizard running on a wall.

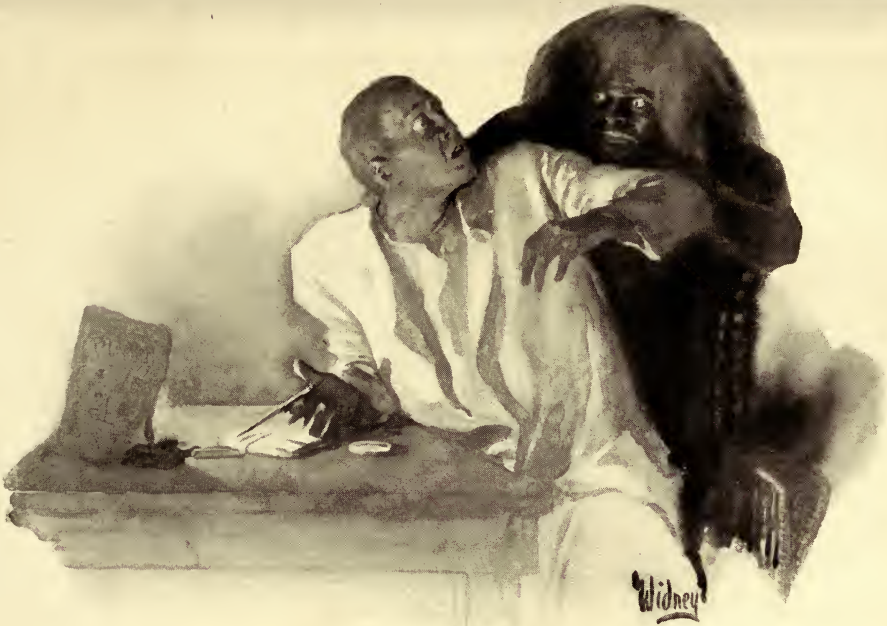
The silence was great, the noise tiny. Long

afterward, David was to remember them both, and the amazing reflex of alarm, the sudden contraction and rebound of muscles, which sent him headfirst through the mosquito gauze, like a clown through a hoop, in panic-stricken somersault. The writer at the table had cried aloud — a single cry, cut short by a terrific scuffle and fall.

Plunging for the lighted door, David went down full length in a crash of broken wood, and rolled among the splinters of a chair. His downfall, louder than the other, shook the house from end to end. When he had risen out of the tangle, and grasping the nearest fragment as a weapon, darted into the next room, he had a confused sense of something dark vanishing through the open door — half imagined, half seen in the merest corner of a glimpse.

What lay on the floor, however, caught and held all his eyesight, all his faculties.

The young stranger, with half his yellow hair turned black, was struggling to rise. His head, lifted with extreme effort, caught the candle-light for a second, in which the black stain shone red. His eyes met David's in a wavering look, without sight or knowledge, and suffered a strange revulsion upward and backward, as if by part of the same force that wrenched him down again in a heap.



THE WRITER AT THE TABLE HAD CRIED ALOUD

It was needless even to look a second time; and yet David, though convinced, fell swiftly to his knees and ratified the certainty. The man had been cut down from behind, at one blow.

Sick and incredulous, David got upon his feet and stared. The room showed no tragic signs, but remained as before, except that a yellow, tattered copy of "Punch," which had screened the candle, now lay between the table and the outer threshold.

He listened. The house, the grove, the whole island, might have been the very centre in an archipelago of the dead. And when for a moment he stood in the door, nothing appeared but the slim, lurking trunks, through which the long bow of coral sand shone like a snowdrift in the moonlight.

Rage seized him at sight of all this unmoved solitude.

"Come in!" he cried, and shook his fist. "Come in here and finish the job!"

The night received his challenge, and gave back no sound.

Returning toward the candle, he stooped and picked up the copy of "Punch." Across the pictured cover, stamped in red and still damp, was the print of a naked foot, with the great toe twisted out, flaring at right angles in no human fashion. He spread the sheet on the table and stared in

a daze, as though poring over an impossible map.

The gleam of something bright, close by, led his gaze dully from the margin. Under the candle the silver locket lay open, the girl's face looking up at him, serene, and far removed from all this violence.

Beside the locket, in turn, lay a small oblong packet, wrapped in manila paper, tied with a neat blue and white twine of Japanese fibre, and sealed with red wax. A pen, not yet dry, leaned across it in a splutter of ink. A moment ago, he had heard that pen at work in the hand of a living man.

It had written but three words on the packet: "For Miss Mary ——"

David looked at her face in the picture, then down at the other face below. Once more the same rage seized him, the same hatred of that inscrutable silence outdoors. He wagged his head stubbornly.

"I'll take it to her," he promised, aloud. "Let them try —"

He broke off, rebuked by the stillness of that other man. Stooping again, he began to do the necessary things which remained.

CHAPTER IV

AT LARGE

"I'LL give her this packet," thought David, as he kept his vigil, spear in hand, through the silence. And in the glare of the next morning, when he turned away from the shallow grave at the foot of a palm, he was already wondering in what terms he might break the news of her loss.

"I 'll find her," he told himself, "and give it her with my own hand, and say — Humph! will I, though!"

After all, he knew only her first name; and at this thought, quickening his pace, he tugged out from his pocket the dead man's keys, and made for the house in a sudden hurry.

The Chinese chest held only clothes, pipe tobacco, a small box of chlorodyne and other medicines, and the usual white man's kit. In the iron trunk lay more clothes, under which were hidden a small chamois bag of sovereigns, and a large canvas pouch of Mexican dollars, weighing down a few sheets of paper marked with neat but unintelligible figures — dates, sums of money, and meaningless abbreviations. From under these

again, David fished out that same green pellet—a wad of plantain-leaf, folded like a chew of betel — which the crawling visitor Ginawang had left. It contained a solitary pearl, not large, somewhat warty, and by no means remarkable either in "skin" or in "orient."

After an hour's search he sat down, utterly defeated: there was not a letter, not a written scrap, to tell who had occupied this desolate house.

"But I know her face," he said doggedly; "and her name's Mary, and she's alive somewhere." He jumped up as though to start off at once. "And I'm going to find her."

A tour of the house and grove left him as ill-prepared as ever. The dead man was no trader in coprah, even by pretext; for there was no go-down, and the cocoanuts lay smashed and rotting on the ground. The dim cathedral of the grove, the blinding crescent of the beach, the luminous indigo and snowy reef beyond, harbored not a living figure. Landward, through the trees, a low slope of misty unwholesome verdure shut off the west.

"Across the island," thought David. "His cook, the Chinese boy, ran off that way. If there's only a settlement —"

On the chance, he set off inland, gripping his spear for a staff, sweltering under his tight clothes and borrowed helmet, as he climbed through the fever-green tangle of *bosque*. Before noon he came

out on a little eminence from which, far off, he caught the glare of the western ocean.

His spirits rose; for under the shade of his hand he could descry a thin pillar of smoke smudging the tremulous air ashore, and on the flat, high band of the sea a scattered flotilla of tiny boats, stuck like currants or dead flies.

"A station there," he thought joyfully; and tired as he was, turned without halting, to tramp homeward and pack up for the journey.

His marching order was light: the locket, the small package, and the loose page of "Punch" with its grisly red defacement, stowed in a breast pocket; in another, the small bag of sovereigns, and the leaf-twisted pearl; and slung over his shoulder, a bundle of clothing wrapped round the Mexican dollars. With this burden, which had begun to grow heavy, he came swinging down at sunset to the western coast.

He broke cover behind a long, dirty, white-washed bungalow, a squat go-down with a tin roof, and the straggling nipa huts of coolie lines. Boats and "poogie" tubs littered the foreshore, which exhaled an insufferable stench of putrid shellfish.

In the veranda, at a table, a gross brown Spaniard lolled in a posture, and with a face, of extreme and lugubrious melancholy. He sat looking into a tumbler full of milk; but at sight of

David he started up in his chair with a squeak of dismay.

"You shall not come back here!" he piped, in a voice absurdly small for his great bulk. "It is no good! I will not speak!" To prove this assertion, he began pouring out a mingled torrent of Spanish and bad English. "Go away!" he cried, fluttering his pudgy hand. "Go away!"

Then his oration stopped short, his mouth remained open in astonishment.

"Oh! Ah!" he gasped. "I think you are that Englishman." And in a rapid parenthesis of eight or ten murky sentences he sketched the Englishman's parentage and conduct.

"You see I'm not," said David, and waited for him to regain breath.

"That man," cried the fat Spaniard, waving his arm toward the eastern side of the island, "he send his cook to be *asesino* to my stom-ache! See, I eat nothing but milk!" Grimacing, with a shudder of burlesque tragedy, the speaker took a sip from his tumbler. "That man, he is the thorn in my meat! Some day, look, I will go shoot him. My divers, they all steal for him; and from the other fisheries, everywhere it is the same. They call him Villameres' Englishman — *my* Englishman! I will go shoot him to-morrow. Tell him so! Last night, look, he send his damn dog to bite me! Aha, look now!"

The speaker chirruped suddenly. His broad face lost all its ferocity, became radiant and fatuous. Along the veranda skipped the fox-terrier, which, with a bound, perched on the fat knees and began sniffing at the glass of milk.

"Aha!" crowed the Spaniard. "Aha, my little friend! You see, he bites me not! I have suborned that man's dog."

David had utterly forgotten the fickle beast, which now nestled comfortably on a new lap. If the runaway had stayed at home last night, and barked, his master might yet be living.

On the heels of this thought followed another: suppose the dog had not run away? David fumbled in his pocket.

"Does this," he said abruptly, unfolding and holding out the torn page of "Punch," "does this mean anything to you?"

The fat man glanced up from patting the terrier, with his brown face still joyful as a babe's.

"What is that?" he asked, looking with unfeigned surprise at the red print of the twisted foot.

David folded the paper, and slipped it into his pocket. This man had no part in last night's doings.

"Nothing," he answered. "That's the wrong paper. I've lost the right one. Will you tell me, señor, where I may sleep for the night?"

The Spaniard eyed him with helpless, wavering suspicion.

"Is that man coming, too?" he squeaked indignantly.

"The man," David quietly replied, "is dead."

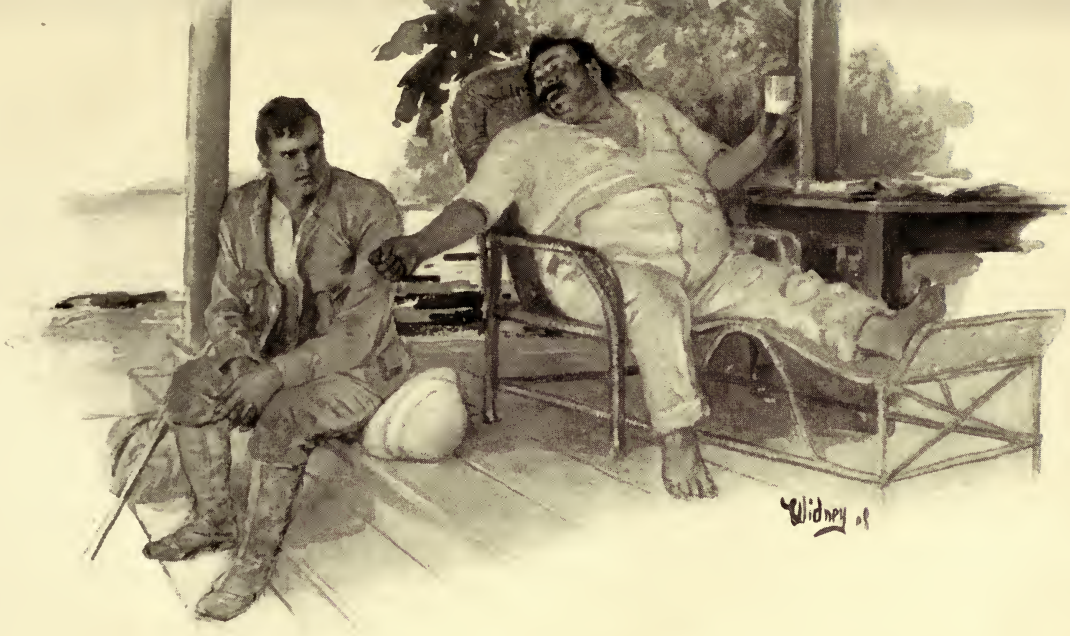
His questioner gave such a start that the terrier fell through his lap. Then, with a sigh of honest relief, he said: —

"I am so glad to hear that."

Smiling pleasantly at David, he took a long sip of milk, and leaned back in his chair to consider.

"I am so glad," he repeated pensively. "He was to my mind just so — as his cook is *asesino* to my stom-ache. You will stay, and celebrate?"

Thus David began his acquaintance with Casimiro Villameres, local agent for the firm of pearl-fishers, Saldero y Hermanos. He was a lazy, melancholy dyspeptic, this agent, in whose bungalow there mouldered the smell of "poogie" tubs and of much greasy cooking. Never had David three more unprofitable days to spend. Villameres, gross and cropfull, squeaked in his absurd little voice straight on from daybreak, through the drowsy noon, to nightfall; but not one word furnished David with any hint beyond what he had already known or guessed. The dead man had bought pearls, independently, and without scruple. Many a coolie from Saldero y Hermanos



HIS COOK IS *ASESINO* TO MY STOM-ACHE

must have crawled under his hut, like the brown man whose arm David had seen rising out of the dark. He had uncounted enemies, said Villameres, but not even they knew him by name.

The runaway cook, a solemn Canton boy, had nothing to impart.

"My no sabee," he repeated stubbornly; once with the sarcastic addition: "Name-card no habgot."

Yet David broke, for an instant, through this Chinese wall of reserve. Without warning, he spread on the table, after breakfast, the loose sheet with which he had already tried Villameres. The slant eyes of the Chinaman never blinked, but he set down a plate which clattered slightly, and turning, left the room. For the rest of that day he was missing.

To get his story, and to understand his terror, David would have tracked him through the jungle; but on the next morning, the Baltasar Saldero, a dirty lump of a steamer, violated the tropic silence of the bay with her screaming whistle and rumbling chains. Her captain, a barefoot *mestizo*, was drunk and still drinking; a black sow ran loose by the forward winches, and a row of gamecocks, crowing without pause, stood fettered by the legs to the rods of her steering-gear; her one bath-tub contained cigar-ends, a torn life-preserver, and a bunch of bananas; but she was

the only craft which for the next month would come nosing through that labyrinth of reefs.

Casimiro Villameres bade his guest farewell with a kind of stolid gloom.

"Adios, Señor Bowman," he said, keeping his seat by the table, with the inconstant terrier asleep on his knees. "I miss you already." He yawned. "A man here, look, he has no conversation." He screwed up his fat face in disgust, as he raised his tumbler of milk. "And even if the cook comes back, he will be *asesino* to my stom-ache!"

The last that David saw, from the stern of the ship, was the huddled, pensive figure fondling his adopted pet.

The crawling steamer, scented by day with onions, coprah, and frying grease, outrageous at night with the squalling challenges of strange game-cocks picked up at every village along the coast, at last came to anchor in the harbor of Cebu.

On the rude veranda of the little club which overhangs the water, a young officer, his khaki badged with the scarlet of the Constabulary, jumped up in such disorder that his glass fell off the rail into the sea.

"Bowman!" he cried, staring. "How in ——! They cabled from Manila that you were dead."

"They were just half right," said David, sitting down exultant in a white man's chair, on *terra*

cognita. "Picked up, I was, and carried all over the shop. Look, bamboo officer: have you any civilian clothes loose enough for me? And what 's the next steamer for Manila?"

The bamboo officer took this resurrection calmly, like a man of experience.

"Sung-Kiang," he answered promptly. "Sails in half an hour. I can fit you. Why this haste? You going home, or she coming out?"

"Shut up," said David. "Come along, give us your wardrobe, and what ready money you can raise."

A gallop in a *carromato* and a spurt in a revenue launch brought him safely on board the Sung-Kiang. In ten minutes out of that hurry he had seen the British consul, and left not only his own written statement, but the dead man's clothes, money, and pellet of plantain-leaf. About the locket, however, he had said nothing; it still lay in his breast-pocket with the little oblong package, the stained page, and the Chinese tailor's label torn from the shooting-jacket.

"These belong to us," he thought, as he watched the shore of Mac-tan slip behind. "It's our affair, hers and mine. And these are all our documents."

That night, at dinner, the blue-gowned steward did him a good service.

"This chit," said David, handing to the sad

dignitary a copy of the tailor's label. "What thing he talkee?"

The steward held the paper clear of the fluttering punkah, and squinted.

"My sabee he," was his grave reply; "b'long Nam Sing, Hongkong shop."

With this crumb of knowledge, David landed in Manila, to be hailed on Muelle del Rey by the first of many friends, all astonished at his restoration from the sea. Friends, affairs, the need of taking up his broken preparations for home, kept him delayed in Manila when he would gladly have followed to Hongkong even so slight a trail as one leading to Nam Sing's shop. Here there was no news; among all the Englishmen with whom he talked at the Tiffin Club or the Ermita, not one could help him; and in these dull, crowded streets the reality of his late adventure began to fade, his promise began to seem quixotic, and his purpose to grow blunt, in spite of the silver case and the packet which he still jealously guarded.

A single episode broke the monotony of his stay. One morning when the Virgin of Antipolo had come down from the mountains, to be carried in state through the city, David, blocked on a crowded corner, saw a man watching him from across the street. The chanting procession passed between, convoying with censers, flags, and un-

lighted candles, the strange little wooden figure aloft in tinsel robes; and among all the staring faces, white or sallow or brown, this one swarthy face, under a rakish straw hat, had no eye for the pageant. So soon as David's glance fell on him, the man turned into the crowd and was gone.

"Who was that?" The dark features, intent and passionate, had leaped out, plain as a threat, from among the sleepy spectators. David had seen the man before, though where, he could not guess. It was a curious face — the forehead low but broad, the mouth coarse but humorous. "He might be anybody," thought David; "anybody, from a Spanish lawyer down on his luck, to a half-breed second engineer. But I've seen him, and — and by his looks, he 's no friend of mine."

He did not meet the fellow again. A week later, his affairs in Manila being wound up, he had taken ship for Hongkong.

It was a sultry morning when he disembarked in that wide and busy harbor, under the steep, dark-green shelter of the Peak. Ahead of the puffing launch, seen between junks, black mail-boats, and drab giants of the China Squadron, the city sweltered through quivering heat. The square, solid houses, tier upon tier of clumsy, tenement-like verandas, promised nothing but heat and stupidity. Far off, by the Kowloon ferry-

slip, the tall figure of a Sikh policeman, in tawny uniform and scarlet turban, upheld on slow-moving spindle-shanks the dignity of British order.

In the face, in the teeth of all this, his dream suddenly came true.

The glare of hot daylight showed, off the port bow of the launch, the high, black bow of a steamer crowded with hundreds of naked bodies, shining wet and golden in the sun — a crowd of coolies sluicing themselves with water. Squabbling and cackling, they made a patch of vivid color, which caught David's eye and held it, as though this familiar sight were something new and strange.

An uneasy sense crept over him, of some great event uncannily repeated, or prearranged, and now about to fall.

Aware of a shadow on the starboard hand, he turned to see, towering high above them, the dark iron crag of a steamer's quarter. The menacing bulk passed close, cleaving the fairway of the harbor toward open sea.

"Must be the Roon," said a talkative landsman to David, knowingly. "She 'll be off for Singapore."

To confute him, the gigantic stern swung deliberately over their heads, displaying the white letters of her name: Yin Shan.

David read them without interest. Then, his eyes chancing to rove higher, he sprang up, bumped into the talkative man, flung him aside, and went jumping aft, over the feet of indignant passengers.

The launch tossed on a wake of seething green and white, like an upheaval of lemon ice. High above this lengthening turmoil, from the after rail of the Yin Shan, a girl in a white dress stood looking down, alone.

She saw David, staring at her as at a ghost. A curious change, almost of recognition, a pallor of sudden and great emotion, transformed her. It was gone quickly, while she made a little gesture of disappointment.

His dream was true and complete. The face, now dislimning into the distance, was the face in the silver locket.

She became a white speck, motionless, in the stern of the departing ship.

CHAPTER V

MARY: IN THE PLAINS

He had seen her. The shocking coincidence left him between amazements — whether he had seen her at last, or too soon, or only by proxy and mistake. This mental hubbub — which set him walking briskly but without aim down half the crowded length of the Queen's Road — subsided or recoiled into his first certainty. The face looking down from the stern was the face inside the dead man's keepsake. He had seen her — but outward bound.

He turned, with a sudden, clear, and urgent purpose. The Yin Shan was Caird & Lovett's boat. He knew a junior in that firm.

"Hai!" At his raised hand, a lounging saffron and blue figure sprang up between brass-bound shafts, and came trundling his rickshaw through the press of busy coolies and grave yellow merchants.

"Fai-di!" The rickshaw tilted, caught the balance, and started on its rattling way.

Under the cavernous, vaulted roof of the pavement, a swarthy man, wearing a slouch Panama,

and Chefoo silk pale as the tassels of ripe maize, turned to inspect the strings of flat, white-powdered devil-fish in a provision shop. So abrupt was his movement, that only by chance had David caught the necessary glimpse. The dark features, the shrewd eyes and coarse but humorous mouth, were those of the stranger who had watched him through the crowd in Manila. Now, by a single flash of discomfiture, they showed that David had turned with inconvenient speed. Nor was it natural for any man to be so suddenly engrossed in dry devil-fish and brown, varnished ducks.

"Now what's he after?" thought David. "I'll ask him, and have it out."

But when he had shouted to the bounding coolie, and the rickshaw, wheeling, had rammed a sedan chair, and disengaged from a brawl, the man in Chefoo silk had dodged out of sight down one of the narrow alleys leading to the fish market.

The incident had faded by the time that David was mounting the great steps of Caird & Lovett, Limited. In a sudden flush of excitement he crossed the dark, cool office, and called for his friend.

A merry little junior, alert and smiling, shook hands across a polished plateau of teak.

"How are Cadwallader and all his goats?" was David's greeting. "Who brought you a pony once from the north of China?"

The happy little Welshman grinned.

"One of my goats," he answered. "But he was a good judge of horseflesh, and what can I do for him?"

"List of passengers, please — Yin Shan." For some reason, David found his pulse beating quickly as he ran his finger down the names, all written alike, stripped of distinction, in the same neat office hand. In a second or two he would know the next word after "Mary" — the word at which the other man had been struck down in the hut.

He groaned.

"What's up?" inquired keen little Mr. Pryce.

"Here," said David, in dismay. "Do you remember either of these?"

He turned the list round, with two fingers, spread apart, on the names:—

"Miss Mary Naves, Sourabaya."

"Miss Mary Arnot, Sourabaya."

The Welshman twisted his gingery mustache, studied the catalogue soberly, then looked up with a twinkling eye.

"Can't say I do," he answered. "Oh, wait a bit! One *was* deuced pretty. But blessed if I remember which came first."

David watched him grimly.

"Ap Evans, Ap Rice, no fooling," he threatened. "I 'm in earnest."

"So am I," said the junior, in surprise. "Don't *you* know which? Bar sells, I don't."

The two men had tiffin together at the club; but though Pryce racked his brain, he could give no further help. The whole affair seemed to please his sense of humor inordinately.

"New departure for you," he suggested, "to take such interest in the ladies. One thing, they'll both be in Sourabaya, and two are better than one. Why not go there?"

"Thanks, I will." David's serious look made the little man stare. "What's the next ship?"

Two afternoons later, Pryce left his cricket to see this unaccountable friend off. His launch dropped astern, and David, turning to climb the ladder, ungratefully forgot him in that instant; for, looking down from the rail, with a smile of satisfaction, was the dark, strangely familiar face of the man in maize-colored silk.

He had gone below by the time David reached the deck.

Doubts were now out of the question. Whoever he was, he had not come all this way by chance. His presence on board was so far welcome, that it would give an impatient traveler something to do.

Through dinner, David watched him down the length of the table. He ate slowly and clumsily, studying, between bites, one after another of his

messmates, with great brown eyes of which the iris, fringed like a Cingalee's with velvety radiation, had a strange lustre, as though touched with belladonna. Yet they were bold eyes, quick and cynical, which met David's with a sly gleam of amusement. The fellow might have been hatching a joke.

Through the general murmur of talk his voice came once or twice — soft and musical, but restrained or retarded, dwelling, now and then, on words which came with effort. He was discussing markets with a Dutch coffee-planter.

At one point, when their talk grew animated, he plucked from the heart of his curry a little white ball of rice, and poising it with finger-tips close-bunched, popped it between his thick lips. Then, abashed, he caught up his fork with an air of guilt.

The trivial slip went unmarked except by David, on whom it had a singular effect. Somewhere he had seen this fellow, or one like him, eating in the same fashion. Where, he could not for his life recall. A reversion to savagery, here in this lighted saloon, the thing stuck in his mind and troubled him.

Later that evening, he had walked his five miles round the deck, and stood by the rail, watching the great stars above an ocean of glossy ebony.

"Sir, will you smoke?" said a low, ingratiating voice. The man in Chefoo silk stood at his elbow, offering a packet of cigarettes.

Before he could say yes or no, David found a cigarette thrust between his lips, and a match, shielded in the box cover, flaming beneath his nose. Above the sudden flare he met the scrutiny of those large, brown eyes, so lustrous and yet so penetrating.

"You get these from Manila," he said, with meaning.

The stranger, invisible after the single flash, laughed pleasantly.

"Oh, yes," he answered, like a child eager to talk. "Oh, yes, I get them there!"

"I have seen you in Manila," said David.

Again the man laughed.

"Oh, yes," said he, "I have seen you there."

"Also in Hongkong?"

This question, equally droll, evoked another fit of musical and artless merriment.

"Yes, yes, in Hongkong, too!" Another match flared, glowed golden through the frail sides of the box, and lighted for an instant the man's heavy lips and strong, white teeth. "In Hongkong I saw you many times, playing at the crickets with your friends. Ah by Jove," he cried, with a comical gusto, "what noble game are the crickets!" Leaning both elbows on the rail, he blew

overboard a long stream from his cigarette, and sighed. "That is a manly devotion. Your great English poet says:—

> "Give me a willow bat, and I
> With cork and hide and twine,
> From century to century
> Will gambol round my shrine!"

The speaker smacked the rail with his open palm. "Ah by Jove, I envy you! A noble game, the crickets!"

David laughed.

"I prefer football," he replied. "Besides, I'm an American."

His companion sighed once more, in genuine disappointment.

"I thought," he answered sadly, "I thought you are English, when I first saw you in ——" He broke off, with some confusion. "I mean, you played the crickets so lifelike. That is too bad!"

David had listened closely. Now, without warning, he struck a match in his turn and held it up.

"Where *did* you first see me?" he propounded severely, studying the face that leaped out so prominent in this little torchlight — a broad, swarthy face, at once bold and suave.

It altered somewhat, gathering sudden lines of craft or perplexity. The match went out, leaving David no wiser, except for a premonition that the

fellow was about to lie. In the darkness sounded a low laugh, of almost infantile pleasure.

"I cannot think," came the answer. "Ah, how extraordiny! I cannot think where it was. But football is noble game, too. For me, no, it is too wild; for I am timid man, and very bookish." The cigarette glowed once or twice, lighting dimly his coarse and cynical lips, which now had a pensive droop. "Do you know" — the soft voice grew deeply confidential — "do you know, my one regreet is, I was not an Englishman. Ah by Jove!"

He continued, leaning on the rail, to smoke and chat and laugh, in the disjointed fashion of a man easily diverted, who has nothing to conceal. Long after bedtime, when they parted, David had learned many gratuitous facts: the man's name was Rosario, he was a sugar-planter, he was bound for Sourabaya to see brokers, and thence go inland. His plans had no offense, his remarks a childlike simplicity, with now and then some unexpected turn of childlike cunning.

And yet by daylight David was far from satisfied. At dinner, this man had watched him with a furtive smile, between anxiety and bravado; at breakfast, he nodded and grinned like an old friend. Plainly, Mr. Rosario had in his own mind settled some point, had formed a secret conclusion, and was henceforth at ease. Moreover,

thought David, he was not of the sugar-planting type, was neither timid nor bookish, and knew perfectly, all the time, where they two had met before.

The voyage slipped by without incident. One hot, clear morning, from the skyline on the starboard hand, rose the steep Coffins of Tuban, and afterward, continuing them to port, the cracked and fissured plateaus of Madura. Gradually this wall split asunder into the yellow gulf that swelters between Madura and the east of Java. The ship ploughed laboriously through turbid water, past the lightship of the Westgat, and on between the green hills of the strait. Far out from Sourabaya roads came racing the clustered hulls of the *tambangans*, which, swerving alongside, manned by fierce brown boatmen, hooked themselves to the steamer at full speed, like a swarm of pirates.

The ship had lost the red roofs of little Grisseh, and went gliding toward the masts and high dusty green *chimara* tops of the city, when below, from among the swirling clump of tethered boats, a new uproar broke out. Boatmen and ship's officers were squalling at one another, as in a moment of collision.

David, turning idly toward the rail, dodged in time to avoid being knocked down by the timid and bookish Rosario, who was running aft at top

THE TIMID AND BOOKISH ROSARIO, WHO WAS RUNNING AFT

speed, scowling over the side, and brandishing his fists as he ran.

Below, on the muddy water, a *tambangan* had cut her painter, and slewed careering astern.

"Mr. Bailey!" roared the captain, from the bridge, "if you can't watch your crimson coolies better than that. . . . The health officer will give *us* what for!"

The *tambangan* sped now so far behind, the glare lay so dazzling in the wake, that David could not be sure; but it seemed, for a glimpse, as though the figure of the escaping steerage passenger, who cowered in the stern-sheets, bore on brown shoulders a matted shock of yellow hair.

David could do nothing but strain his eyes. Blurred by sun and water, that head was almost like the head of the tattooed savage in the *banca*. The resemblance brought with it some sharp perplexity even more elusive — some vague and obstinate question, as though the sight had recalled, to the very brink of memory, something vastly more important. The *tambangan* drew steadily away toward the low, bilious-green shore of Grisseh marshes.

The Dutch doctor, a fat, red-bearded little busybody, left him no time for speculation; and as soon as he had landed and was driving in a *kosong* past the line of gaudy Madura praus, —

which, with their carved and blazoned sterns, perennially brighten the mud and heat of the Kali Mas, — he had a far more absorbing puzzle to consider.

The slip of paper in his hand contained, in Pryce's neat memorandum, his two blind alternatives: —

> Miss Mary Arnot:
> Miss Mary Naves:
> Were t'other dear charmer away!

"That may be the Welsh sense of humor," thought David sourly. "But it 's no joke."

A furious clatter of hoofs, close behind, the pistol-shot snapping of a whip, and guttural cries of "*Hrri, hrri!*" made him turn his head, in time to see a pair of galloping ponies dash round the corner of the Grisseh road. On the seat of a *kosong*, tilted almost to capsize, sat his friend Rosario. The clatter and rumble died away among the marshes.

Before nightfall, David had eviscerated the register of every known hotel, Simpang, Wijnveldt, Embong-Malang; but on no page could he find either Mary Arnot or Mary Naves. Long after dark he was still driving aimlessly through unknown streets, without dinner and without hope.

At last it became necessary to eat, in spite of disappointment.

"*Makan*," he called to the driver. "*Makan, chupput!*"

"*Bai, Tuan.*" The taciturn Malay wrenched back his ponies' heads, and stopped under a guttering lantern which projected from a wall. The faint light, shifting on a surface of mouldy plaster, revealed in garish red and blue, the letters — "Roemah Makan."

The face of this anonymous hotel was so forbidding, the vaulted way which led within so damp and malodorous, that David began to suspect the driver's judgment. In a dingy little office, a fat Eurasian, young and supercilious, sat beside a lamp and mopped his face.

"Dinner is over," he announced languidly, eying David with extreme weariness.

Content with this news, David was turning away, when his glance fell on a small packet beside the lamp. The sprawling superscription leaped out to startle him: —

"Miss Mary Naves, Kamer 7."

He caught up the packet with a pounce that woke the nodding half-breed.

"Is this young lady in?"

The mild Eurasian eyes slowly brightened to the situation.

"Oh, yes," was the answer. "Will you take her that? I forgot. It came from the shop this noon."

Extolling his luck, David passed quickly into the stifling little courtyard, a hollow square of dark verandas, where a tiny jungle of trees crowded and pressed in a still darker night. From the door of room seven, however, streamed a faint light into which jutted one corner of a table, the back of a chair, and in that chair the head and shoulders of a woman.

David stepped forward briskly, his feet echoing on the cool, wet stones of the veranda floor. His pulse, it seemed to him, made more noise in the sweltering court.

"I've found her," he told himself; and already a wild plan had crossed his mind to rescue her from these unworthy surroundings. Seeing only a gleam of yellow hair in the lamplight, he raised his helmet and put his question.

"Sure, that's my name," replied a ready and all too affable voice. The yellow head rose farther into the light, taking on a sudden, frouzled, meretricious splendor, in the same instant that a strong young arm, draped in a kimono of vivid scarlet, lazily withdrew from covering a yawn. "I'm *the* Miss Naves, with the movin' picture show. What you got for me? Say, a little ee-lectricity would n't do this hotel no harm, what?"

For a moment David stood like an ox. By some vacuity, he had thought that both Marys,

the right and the wrong, must be the top of admiration, being the twins of circumstance.

"I — I intended —" He forgot, and then, remembering, laid the packet on her table. "This came from the stores, you know —"

The young arm in the scarlet sleeve reached out vigorously.

"The stores! Why did n't you say so?" Her voice rose, domineering. "I thought you was some gentleman to see me. Took your time bringing it!"

David went softly back along the veranda, a wiser man, grinning in the dark.

Within ten paces, however, he had wheeled and was running back; for a shrill cry, of preternatural volume, rang in the stuffy courtyard with overtones of such terror as might pierce an Amazon.

It was strange to find so robust a young woman, with limbs so long, hair so abnormally bright, and drapery so red, lying white and senseless on the matting in her room; significant to discover that the poor parcel from the stores was missing; but beyond all expectation, to see, stamped on the margin of dry cement between matting and threshold, dark with moisture from the newly-washed veranda, the print of a twisted foot, on which the great toe flared at right angles.

CHAPTER VI

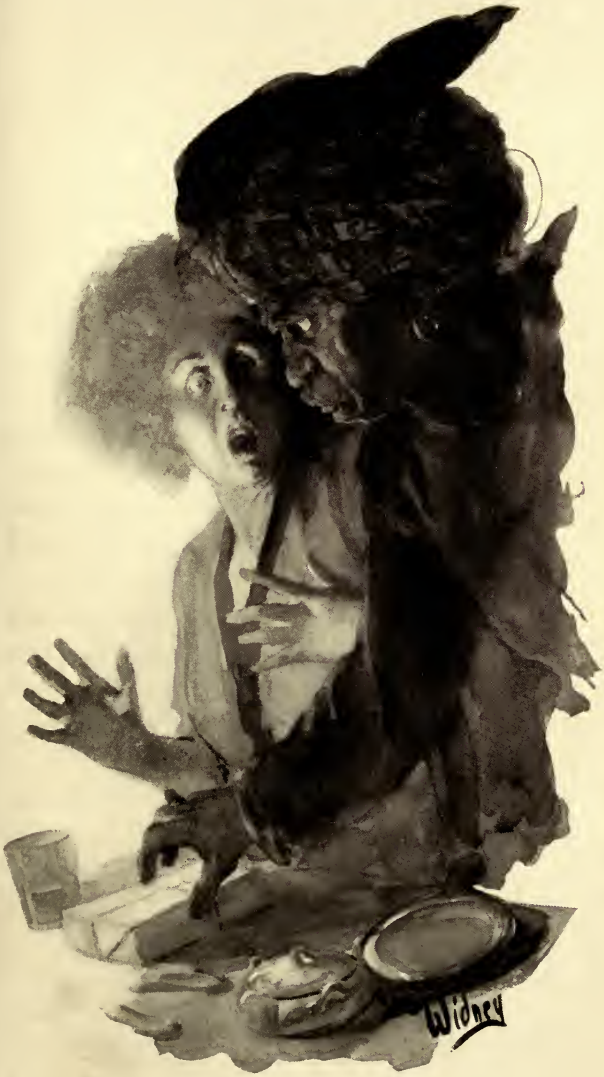
MARY: IN THE HILLS

Miss Naves had pitched her one outcry so effectively that no second was needed. Footsteps, both shod and bare, came swiftly down the veranda, and into the room bounded three Javanese boys, the oily Eurasian, and the *kosong* driver. The Eurasian, fixing David with a terrified stare, hastily took a position behind the natives, and began to mumble something about an arrest.

"Here!" David snapped his fingers under the man's nose. "Catch hold, and help me with her, you Kubu! And you men," he cried, in the vernacular, "go hunt among the trees, for anybody hiding!"

So, with all the appearances against him, the white man took charge of that curious scene. The long young woman in the scarlet robe was no easy armful, and the sputtering Eurasian was only in the way; but at last David contrived to replace her in the veranda chair.

"I think, I think," stuttered the clerk, "we shall give her some brandy, sir? No, sir? None, sir, of course! Excuse me, sir!"



A SHRILL CRY OF PRETERNATURAL VOLUME

The drooping head, all too bright and fair, weakly roused for a moment, and as weakly sank.

"Ah!" sighed Miss Naves, and reaching out a strong young arm, tenderly enfolded the nearest neck, which happened to be David's. "A-a-h! What was it?"

"The lady is better," said the sapient clerk.

"Get out!" cried David savagely, wriggling to free his head from that chancery of red silk.

A slow grin overspread the melancholy Eurasian features.

"I did not mean to intrude, sir."

The fat creature retired with the bow of a Grandison.

By her clasp, the lady was growing better and better.

"Let go, please," begged the captive. "Please."

She opened her eyes, looked at him in gradual comprehension and offense, then sat bolt upright, suddenly and precisely.

"Well, I should say!" she cried, with honest indignation. "We ain't such friends as all that!" She sank back again, feebly. "Oh, crickey, I had a nawful turn!"

The three Javanese boys and the *kosong* driver were beating the shrubbery to no purpose. They skipped about and dodged among the heavy leaves — lithe, white-coated figures, red-sashed, with their pert little turbans, of mottled colors,

tied up behind in knots like rabbit-ears. Their hunt served only to wake a tree-lizard, who hic-coughed loudly from the upper branches. At the sudden, broken sound, the prostrate Amazon started in her chair.

"My nerves," she said plaintively, "my nerves are all of a jump. I sing, you know, so it's temp'rament; but then, anyhow, I *had* a nawful turn!"

"What was it?" David felt that his tone could never be too kind. "What frightened you?"

To his bitter disappointment, Miss Naves shook her head, and screwing her eyes tight shut, enjoyed another crisis of temperament.

"O-o-h my!" She trembled, and shrank together as far as her generous frame allowed. "O-o-h, a nawful face, that was all! And a big head in a red cloth. I don' know, but seemed like it was that. The parcel you brought, I was taking it in to open where I could look — and somebody grabbed, and — and that's all *I* waited to see!"

David glanced at the margin of cement in the doorway. Already it was dry: the print of the twisted foot had vanished.

"Nothing more?" he coaxed.

"More?" snapped the convalescent, opening her eyes in wrath. "No; it was enough, *I* tell you! Things like that, jumping into a lady's room! And snatching parcels! Ain't they found him?"

The armed coachman and the three boys in mottled turbans had come to the veranda edge.

"There is not, my lord," they reported, with salaam. Whoever had been there must have fled behind the bathhouse and along the canal. "There is not, my lord."

"Your parcel 's gone for good, I fear," said David. "Was it valuable?"

The lady sniffed, and drew the scarlet folds about her with the dignity of a Roman matron.

"You ought to know," she retorted coldly. "I bought it in your shop. A comb, it was, that I paid good money for, too. I never saw but one like it, aboard ship once; and this o' yours was only imitation."

David drove his fist into his palm.

"Of course!" he cried. "Aboard ship, and I never thought! Tell me. Tell me, Miss Naves, and I'll get you the most glorious comb in Sourabaya. Where was she going — I mean Miss Arnot?"

The young giantess raised the excessive glory of her head, opened her mouth, and for once in her career found no word ready.

"You give me the creeps, young fellow," she declared at last. Her hard eyes, quick with calculation, made nothing out of him. "How could *you* tell 't was Miss Arnot's comb I liked? And you fetching parcels? You don't know *her!*"

David, for an instant, wavered before this home truth.

"Yes," he answered lamely, "I do know her — a little."

"And like her, too!" The woman's rejoinder pounced, like a hawk, on his confusion. "Oh, you men! Could tell by the way you spoke. See here." Miss Naves rolled out of her chair, and, shining in her scarlet kimono, rose to the height and posture of an angry prophetess. Her voice became strident. "Look here, do you know what that girl did to me? Well, out o' the whole lot aboard ship, she treated me like a human being! That 's what *she* did. You! D' ye think she 's your kind? She — she 's a wonder!"

David waited for a lull.

"Should you like," he put in humbly, "to do her a favor?"

The stormy sibyl reared higher at so mild a question.

"Favor? I 'd give her this off my back!" And for one moment of perilous realism, Miss Naves wrenched at her fiery robe. Then, desisting, she looked again, more keenly, straight into David's eyes, and heard him out, with the fixity of one who would not miss a particle.

"Message!" She tossed her head, and gave a short, hard laugh. "Important message, eh? Mind you, I 've *seen* Miss Arnot, and so I know

your feelings! And you'd go give her a message from another man, and him fond of her, too!"

She laughed, this time bitterly.

"You're a fool. That's plain." Under the red silk she heaved her broad shoulders; then, flinging out her hands in contempt, she turned, lifted a smelling-bottle, sniffed, and put it down in disgust. "Being square — there's nothing to it. But you're the sort o' fool, I s'pose, *that* girl would think was . . . Anyhow, she's gone to Arvana, over middle-Java way, and — and I wish you luck!"

Hunger did not signify that evening, as David, smoking black Sumatra tobacco with infinite relish, leaned back on the dirty leather of the *kosong* and watched, far overhead, the bright host of tropic stars. Arvana: there, by this time to-morrow night, he would see, alive and real, the face in the locket, the face out of his dreams that had looked down at him — so many miles away — from the stern of a departing ship. Arvana; Mary Arnot: two certainties now — and he had slashed through to them as through a jungle of guesswork and cross-purpose and incongruity. Arvana; Mary Arnot; to-morrow: he stretched out his legs, threw back his head, and blew a cloud of tobacco smoke at the stars, as he rolled through the dark streets in lordly revel.

A noise, behind the rattle of his *kosong*, gradu-

ally claimed attention. Another rattle, and a conflicting patter of ponies' hoofs, followed steadily in his wake, turning the same corners, at the same pace, without gaining or losing ground.

David turned to peer over the back of his carriage. Behind, the darkness was complete.

"No lamps there." Leaning forward and thrusting, he brought the point of his rattan between the driver's shoulder-blades. The Malay pulled up his ponies in their tracks.

The incoördinate clatter stopped instantly, with a creak and jingle of straining harness.

"No mistake," thought David. "That settles it."

He stood up, and leaning against the forward seat, gave his orders in a whisper.

"*Bai, Tuan.*" The driver's mottled turban nodded; his long gilt whip swung in the faint lamplight; and off the ponies bounded, cutting a corner perilously, to scamper down into the full radiance of the Chinese "camp." Half-way through the street, with a jerk and a plunge as though following a polo-ball, the ready little beasts tore a neat half-circle. A quick test of horseflesh and horsemanship, it was well-timed; for in the full glare from a joss-house door — carved, gilded, and ghastly with acetylene lamps — there swung into brilliant view the pursuing *kosong*, all unprepared for such doubling, and

still at the gallop. As it flashed by, David caught a glimpse of the tugging driver — a Javanese, who grinned sourly, like a humorous man caught napping; of a Sikh watchman on the box, in faded khaki, head bound with scarlet turban; and — on the seat behind — of Mr. Rosario, that lover of books and cricket, his face contorted with fiery expostulation and chagrin.

The whole disclosure, vivid and fleeting, passed to the hurry of hoofbeats into the night.

David's man pointed after with his long, golden whip: —

"*Desini, Tuan?*"

"*Tida.*" David shook his head. "*Simpang.*" And as the ponies trotted willingly for home and stables, he sat with chin on breast, vexed and wondering.

Not till dusk of the next day, when the slow, fat little Dutch train came puffing into a bare station on the Arvana line, did the real upshot of that night's adventure become clear. The journey had given David plenty of time for thought. Whoever had stamped the footprint in Miss Naves's chamber, had snatched the packet from her hand not only in great haste and greed, but by mistake. "It was mine they wanted," David told himself, patting the breast of his tunic. Inside, he felt the corners of that small oblong riddle: it lay there safe enough, — safer, indeed, than

when first wrapped and tied by the young stranger in his island hut. Yet now, as the convex outline of the silver locket also met his fingers through the cloth, he received a further enlightenment.

"This won't do," he reflected, while he climbed out into the press of sweaty coolies clamoring for luggage. "It won't do, to give these things to her."

He paused, blocking traffic.

"I must go ahead. She may know better. I must see her, anyway." And the knowledge that this last was not merely possible, but near at hand, sent his thoughts flying forward once more.

His carriage soon left the little town far beneath in the dusk.

Blood-red pools, penciled in clusters of sharp, black, tiny strokes where young rice-blades stood bundled, now faded rapidly in the tropic night, leaped out for a moment as glowing indigo, and were gone. His groom, a turbaned silhouette perched on a bundle of bristling fodder, sang and chirruped, urging the ponies up the westward slope to where the keen edge of volcanoes scalloped the last brightness in the sky, like a range of Fujiyamas cut from sheet-iron. Up and up wound the road, till among the obscure texture of bamboos and lowlier growth, shafts of the tall *rasamala* ran their black lances toward the

stars. An ape went rustling through the treetops, racing the carriage for a time, before he swung down and over, hundreds of feet, into the ravine below, to chatter like some shrill woman imparting nonsense eagerly. Then followed a great stillness, filled with the heavy night-perfume of flowers.

Suddenly, round a sharp turn, where the road ran more level on the broad mountain shoulder, lamps twinkled through the trees.

"There it is!" thought David; and light and thought were joyful to him. "Now then! — I'll walk."

He called to the driver, leaped out into the road, and with a curt order sent the carriage rattling on ahead; for with the settlement so near in view he found himself all flushed, giddy, devoid of plan and of words, in this whirl of close anticipation.

The road rose gently underfoot, hemmed in on one side by tops of liquid-amber trees shooting up from below an unseen precipice, and on the other by a long, white wall of mountain lilies, tall and pale in the dusk as flowers of Botticelli. Down the defile, as he advanced, pattered a slow company of dark shapes bent under burdens of strange bulk and outline — musicians of the *gamelan*, as David guessed, returning from some marriage-feast in the hills. Calling now and then

to each other in low voices of liquid cadence, they passed on below, leaving the road empty as a hermit's glen.

Down this came, presently, a murmur of singing, to the tinkle of some wayside music. And then, round another turn of the road, where the lights shone in a distant row from a long, white veranda, David came upon a little group under a tree.

A shriveled man, cowering on the ground, plucked the strings of his canoe-shaped harp, and sang in a plaintive voice, hushed and oppressed as though by the fear of darkness, and age, and mystery. Beyond the harper, on a rude bench, sat an indistinct figure in white, with another standing alongside.

By the heavy fragrance of *melati* blossom, these, thought David, must be native women. He waited till the murmur of song had ceased, and the harper taken his hand from the strings.

Then, in their own tongue, he spoke them fair, as became a people of great courtesy. It was still many steps to the lighted veranda. Why, as he now snatched at this delay, should his heart jump heavy and rapid, as though he already stood at the end of his search, in the very presence?

The harper rose, and with a stealthy deference withdrew his little boat of music from the speaker's way. The light touched for an instant a snowy

garland about his neck; it was he, and not a native woman, who wore the *melati* flowers.

At the same time the white figure rose from the bench.

"Yes, that is the hotel," was the answer. "And you did not disturb our music."

Off came David's helmet. The voice, clear and level, brave and friendly, was the voice that he had waited for and known in fancy. Darkness, the thick pool of night under the trees, could no longer hide her face. Not alone by feeble sight, but as if by all his senses combined and rejoicing, he knew it was the face in the silver locket.

"I have come," he said, — without need to halt or stammer, for, by inspiration, he knew plain honesty to be both guide and warrant, now and always, — "I have come a long way to speak with you."

CHAPTER VII

KUBOYONG

"To speak with me?" The voice, though troubled, was quiet and friendly. "Then, shall we walk toward the house, meanwhile?"

Afterward he recalled how, as her white figure moved out of leafy shadow, the veranda lights, that streamed athwart the glossy tops of little garden shrubs, evoked a dusky radiance from her hair; and how, behind them both, her native girl came, tall and lithe in a white *kabaia*, like a slave contentedly following some gentle princess. Yet now, as they two first walked together, David saw nothing but her face beside him, her head and shoulders above the shrubbery, as though she advanced through a low mist, or made a luminous circle in the gloom by the mere light of her countenance. The silver locket, holding the truth, had not held that light, and life, and magical reality.

"I can guess," she added; and this time her voice trembled. Speaking, she glanced up at him, with eyes large, quiet, and yet uncertain, as though ready for the best tidings or the worst. "I can guess, for there's only one subject a stranger

could come to tell me about. Gerald sent you? You are a friend of his? Tell me, where is he? How can I get to him?"

They halted in the path, eying each other silently for a moment. David was prepared to find her beautiful, but not so radiant and regnant, all in plain white, yet crowned with a dusky splendor of shining hair. He was prepared to know and to be known, but not to have her go direct to the heart of his errand. More than all, he was prepared to pity her; but not to feel this great wave of pity that swept away all his foolish, unadmitted hopes, to leave him heartily ashamed. Disloyal to the other man, he had been disloyal to her; now let him serve honestly, with his best service.

"No," he began, "I was not sent, exactly. Your — he and I could n't be called friends, but — he — you see —"

Her eyes, dilated in the obscure light, looked straight through his confusion. Her face — quickened with the clear spirit which had met his, in the glare of that strange morning aboard the *banca* — now grew slightly pale.

"Come, tell me true." She faced him with courage. "Is he still — Speak out; be frank with me; for I've looked everywhere, asked everybody; and after failing here, again, coming here on another false hope — why, the best thing is

the truth. Tell me, as though you *were* his friend — and mine."

By sudden consent, they walked on together through the glistening alley of leaves. The mournful, ululating song of a mountaineer floated to them through the darkness, close at hand, from a neighboring spur across deep gulfs. Dull and heavy, a hollow log, smitten in some village far below, boomed out the hour in seven strokes.

The veranda lay desolate in all its whitewash, except that under the farthest lamps three fat men in pajamas, and a lady with bare ankles, sat playing bridge in Dutch.

The girl paused, with one foot on the steps.

"Oh, please!" she begged.

"I have something of his to give you," David slowly replied. "One thing must wait till later, but this other —" He fumbled inside his tunic, and drew forth the silver locket, which he held out, as one might surrender a talisman. "I brought you this — from him."

The girl put one hand quickly against a pillar. Her eyes were not dark, but very blue, as David saw before he turned his own aside and waited.

"His locket!" she whispered, with a little sob that left David more shaken than if her finger-tips, on the pillar, had been the hand of Samson. "He never would have given — tell me, were you with him, when — at the time?"

"I was," said David, staring hard at a clump of white lilies which he did not see.

"Was it — is it a place where I could go?"

David shook his head.

"An island — very far from here."

The song of the mountaineer, descending in the night across the gulf, came to them in snatches, like a hopeless call. As though listening, the girl turned her face away.

"I'm glad you were there," she said, contending for the mastery of her voice. "Very, very glad. It brings him nearer, somehow — and then — there's something in your face — something that's good to see there, and makes me glad he had *you* then."

David, silent and guilty, felt a return of the old envy. That other man, in his grave, possessed quietly forever what all the living could not win by all their struggles. Her grief was very calm, but of the calmness which outwears time and chance.

The wailing singer in the dark had passed below and out of earshot, round some jutting edge, before she spoke again.

"I must go in." Her lips were trembling, as she turned once more to David. "For a while — I must — be alone. Later, we shall talk." She beckoned to the slim native girl, who stood patiently beside the clump of lilies. "Oh, and you said — there was something else of his for me?"

David raised his hands toward the breast of his tunic, but lowered them, with a vague reluctance.

"To-morrow, please, by daylight." He faltered, then found his excuse. "It's only a small packet. Not this evening? I think—I think *he* would rather have it so."

He caught from brimming eyes a swift, unexpected glance, full of comprehension, or discovery, or gratitude. Above him, on the edge of the veranda, she paused as in perplexity.

"To-morrow? But to-morrow I shall be leaving." She spoke wearily, as though details no longer mattered. "The train starts at early daylight, I believe. In Batavia, Mrs. Hemmes will be looking for me. And you see, my passage is taken for Thursday."

David felt a trace of relief.

"Then," said he, "if I may come to Batavia? Before your ship sails —"

The well-known face, crowned with shining hair, maintained a last failing show of courage.

"You are very kind to me," she answered; then, beckoning the servant with a quick, fierce motion: "Come, Chatra!"

The brown girl, simpering, brushed past him on the steps. Left alone, David stood looking out upon the vast night, where, alike in their blackness, the established hills and the downward-pouring clouds cut strange gores from the

starry substance of the heavens. Behind him, at their cards, the players held a sputtering argument, with great gusts of Batavian laughter. But without caring to see or hear, David remained rapt in wonder. The shuttle of flying chance had woven the loose thread of his life, for once, into serviceable stuff. He had fallen overboard at midnight, had seen a light from shore, and heard a dog bark. The poor Amazon, Mary Naves, won by a nod and a smile or two, had overheard and treasured, for a few days, the name of this station in the hills. And here, following so frail a clue of accidents, he had come to deal the heaviest blow to the last person in the world. . . .

"To her." Remembering how eagerly he had climbed this mountain road, he could have groaned at his own baseness. "Well," he ordered himself severely, "you look after her till Thursday. Your best, too."

To see that her property was safe, he plucked out of his tunic and scrutinized in the bright light of the veranda her small, oblong packet.

The three words might have been written yesterday: "For Miss Mary ——"

"She gets *you!*" was his scowling apostrophe. "She gets you, safe and sound, aboard ship, and no more fooling!"

Perhaps it was the stir of his own fancy; but as he slid the packet home he seemed to hear a

rustle, cut short, among the tall stalks of the lilies where Chatra, the brown maid-servant, had lately stood. Beyond doubt, one of the great white chalices was bowing drowsily.

He strode over and thrust his rattan through and through the stalks, like a rapier. It struck nothing; and on the farther side nothing appeared but solid shadows, flung from clump to clump of mountain greenery.

"Humph!" he growled. "Mooning again! Nerves — old woman's trick!"

A card-player, proud of his English, called jocosely: —

"Aha! A snake, not?"

"No," said David briefly; "a granny-not."

"Zo-zo!" The Hollander nodded ponderously, well pleased with so technical a report.

But David was far from satisfied. Dinner, with its dearth of talk, and heaping abundance of rice, passed dolefully enough; the evening more dolefully, although the Dutch gamesters, who had shod themselves for the dining-room, unshod themselves once more and made the empty veranda echo with their jovial argument. Long before they were quiet, the light went out behind Miss Arnot's screen. And at last, alone, and weary of the long wait before to-morrow's journey, David entered his bare little room reluctantly.

Reluctantly: he wondered at that, as all the

evening he had wondered at a strange uneasiness which made him look about and listen. He expected nobody. His part was over; except the hardest part, that would begin — when a ship had sailed on Thursday — for the rest of his life. No; this, to-night, was different — and disquieting.

Once he caught himself glancing, through his open door, at the lilies, the ambush of green leaves and white chalices.

"Nonsense!" In anger, he snatched out the dead man's packet, and tossed it on the table. With it fluttered something else; the page from "Punch" skimmed half-way across the floor, unfolded, and lay flat to show its grisly red surcharge.

"Oh, will you?" David swooped after it, and in a sudden passion of defiance tore the paper to shreds. "There, then!"

He flung them into the corner, as though canceling some bond or breaking a sinister compact. She, at least, would never see or know that thing.

But the vague insecurity came flooding back upon him. He went to the door, even, and hearkened to the stillness of the great mountains. Nothing stirred but the white smoke of night-clouds beginning to roll down through the garden. He remembered listening so in the door of the hut, that night among the palms.

"What rot!" He wheeled, returned grum-

bling, and stolidly prepared to sleep. An early start to-morrow, and with her — enough to think about; and Thursday — that also was enough, for one lifetime.

To-night there was no thin oval of silver to slip beneath his pillow, with the packet; but grasping this last treasure the more tightly, he lay down with it, fist and all, under his head.

From tangled dreams he woke now and then to ask himself in drowsy, blank regret, what disaster was impending. "Oh, yes, Thursday." And muttering, he slept again.

The windows glimmered in two wide, misty squares, the crowing of gamecocks rose thin and scattering from villages below the clouds, when David finally woke to some new trouble. Through the ragged fringe and outskirts of slumber, there might have sounded the fragments of a melody, — as though first a woman's voice, nearing along the veranda, had crooned a snatch of *Kuboyong*, "The Captive"; and then a man's voice, in the distance, had caught up her song and carried it floating down the mountain. This, if real, ceased abruptly. Now broad awake, David listened. Outside, in the veranda, two gentle Malayan voices interwove in a subdued and timorous altercation.

"*Cassi bangan!*" pleaded a woman, repeating the words like a petulant refrain.

"*Tida!*" The "boy" in charge of David's room denied her, mildly and scornfully. "My lord desires not our knocking. He rises at four strokes. It has not struck three. *Astaga!* Is there no decorum?"

"My lady," the woman's voice meekly persisted, "my lady wishes . . ."

"Oho! That beautiful one?" The boy surrendered, with a quiet laugh. "Give knocking, thou!"

Light knuckles tapped the panel of the door.

"Come!" cried David, wondering at this early visit.

The door creaked open, to admit the drowsy light of a lamp, which the barefoot chamberlain bore gravely across the room, and set upon the table. Still gravely, the Javanese took from a high teak wardrobe his master's kimono, and approached the bed.

"My lord will hear this woman?" he ventured, bowing. "She desires to speak."

The messenger had hardly withdrawn, and David, slipping his packet, as always, into the pendent sleeve, had wound but half the sash about his blue robe, when at the edge of the lamplight stood a slim white figure, tall yet drooping, with the languid grace of a young bamboo. Chatra, the brown maid, raised her great eyes askance at him, smiled, and let them coyly decline under their long lashes.

"What do you want?" began David, — severely, for this vision was not without loveliness.

Once more the girl exercised the power of her dark eyes, fingered the silver Bantam breast-pin on her *kabaia*, lowered her sleek head, and smiled with furtive content, like one who had found favor in her master's sight.

David grinned at the unseasonable coquetry.

"Yes, yes," he remonstrated. "You're a very pretty girl, and all that; and these tiles are 'cool and refreshing, especially to the legs'; but, my dear, I seldom make eyes before breakfast. What," he repeated, in the vernacular, "do you want?"

Chatra, simpering, glanced at him, then away, then downward demurely.

"My lord, forgive." Her voice was like the sleepy cooing of nutmeg pigeons in a deep grove, at dawn. "Forgive. My lady sends me to speak. My mistress: she prepares to go. She desires a gift."

"She? — a gift?" David bent on the speaker a short, incredulous stare; but remembering the vagueness of her race and tongue, added with lenience: "What gift?"

The long graceful limbs twisted bashfully under their white stole. Once again the girl looked up, away, and down fixedly at the tiles. Her toes,

a delicate saffron in the lamplight, wriggled as freely as a babe's.

"The gift," she answered, with embarrassment; "the gift — of a packet. My lady wishes — to see."

David's hand started, by instinct, toward the hanging sleeve of his kimono. He watched the maid. No: there was no guile in such conscious beauty.

"Is it an order?" He flung the question at her sharply, and still watched.

"An order, Tuan." Chatra raised her eyes, to hold them steady and liquid-bright, as though relieved at remembering her authority. "An order. My lady wishes — to see."

David, slipping in his hand, brought up the packet from his sleeve. Though now smudged round the corners, the manila paper was still neatly folded, still firmly tied with the blue and white Japanese twine, and still bore legibly the superscription written in the hut, and never completed — "For Miss Mary ——." There was no reason why she should not have her own. Even if she sent for it before daybreak, his foolish misgivings might not delay the transfer.

"Wait." Moving to the door, he thrust out his head. From Miss Arnot's window, a broad flange of lamplight splashed across the tiles, and up the white pillars of the veranda. She was awake,

then, with her sorrow; awake, and making ready for her journey, which, of so many departures, began without hope. "That," thought David, "I put an end to."

He returned, and faced the smiling Chatra.

"Here you are," said he.

Strangely unwilling, he held forth the small oblong packet which he so long had treasured.

"*Bai, Tuan,*" murmured the brown handmaiden submissively. Her slender fingers, closing round the precious object, shone dusky pink, like the cool fingers of a tropical Aurora. "*Bai, Tuan.*"

She bowed, then glided out across his threshold, her slim body revealing a listless grace under the white robe, her heels shining polished and fragile as egg-shells. Without a sound, she vanished as though melting into the gray mist that swam outside the doorway.

David remained motionless, ill content.

"If she *was* lying, now?" he wondered. Again, quickly, he crossed his room and peeped into the veranda.

Chatra had spoken faithfully, however; tall and swaying, her figure slid like a phantom through Miss Arnot's door. In her hand, a final gleam of white showed the packet safely on its way.

Inside once more, David finished the knot of

his sash, caught up a towel, and shuffling into flat sandals of bullock's hide, turned mechanically toward his bath. Roused for the day, he had no further business with sleep; so that when, of a sudden, a timid sound of music echoed from the veranda, he wheeled in a sharp and troubled impulse of listening.

Chatra's voice, half lifted in song, broke off with a quaver. Below the slope, lingering like the clouds among the dense rattans, a wailing tenor briefly sustained the next bars of the ancient song.

No question of dreaming now, thought David; two persons had raised the lament of "The Captive," *Kuboyong*, in tremulous call and answer.

Beyond the open door, beyond a gleaming pillar, the dim white chalice of a lily swung and nodded in the darkness.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SHADOWS

THE lily bowed lightly, as though on a stalk released from pressure. Before its motion ceased, David sprang out, and losing both sandals on the veranda steps, plunged across the driveway and through the shrubbery.

He brought up, next moment, on the verge of the mountain-side. Under his bare feet, a narrow path of smooth-beaten volcanic dust ran winding, horizontal, between dim hedges of flowers. Overhanging from these, to his right in the dusk, another white bell nodded, lately stirred by a passing shoulder.

Thus guided, he ran along the cool and fragrant alley, his feet wet with the dew of night clouds. Round turn after turn he dodged, following the freakish contour of the volcano, and expecting, at each sudden change of direction, to overtake some figure flitting ahead through the twilight. But always the path wound thread-like before him, empty and still.

Through the leaves, presently, filtered a murmur of low voices, the whinny of a horse, the clack of a hoof on stone, and the dry creak from

straining leather. The alley turned sharp for the last time, to cast David forth on a wider level, cut from the solid mountain shoulder, — a tiny plateau where flaring torchlight, and the dull eyes of carriage lanterns, disclosed a busy confusion of horses and grooms, with a golden background of bamboo sheds. Across wild Rembrandt darkness and glow, a mountaineer led two prancing ponies; his lacquered hat, as he harnessed them to a "mylord," shone in glossy vermilion.

David wheeled about, laughing at this anti-climax. His mystery, the song of the two voices, the swaying lilies, had brought him only to the stables.

"I was running," he told himself with a chuckle, "I was running after some Oriental love-story in the servants' quarters!"

Brushing through the flowery corridor, he returned, slowly, aware of the morning dampness, and of a comical chagrin. Chatra and the grooms, hereafter, might sing back and forth unmolested. Before the clump of lilies where his pursuit had begun, he halted in the path, to study the dim prospect stretching far below in steep undulation.

From this hanging garden, as from a green parapet or jutting prow of foliage, he could see only a region of sky and darkness, floored with a billowing pallor of clouds which reflected upward, faintly, the thin but increasing light of

dawn. The world below was a plain of milky vapor that shaded, without edge or limit, into nothing. Yet close beneath his feet, straight downward as in a pit, there glowed a sullen, ragged light, a quaking subterranean flame. He craned over the verge. Sheer underneath, by the streaming fire-points of bamboo torches, a little squad of hill-men were toiling like ants upon the road. Enormous shadows of their heads, arms, and shovels, quick intercrossing legs that spindled to a hundred yards of altitude, went rioting in silhouette across the nearer clouds like a combat of phantoms. Unconscious of their own gigantic turmoil over the landscape, the coolies worked steadily, mending the highway, where clustered their flaming fasces of bamboo splinters. The road itself, slanting from left to right, showed like a fish-hook of orange metal, with the barb bent downward into the night. Though half a mile distant by carriage, in depth the squad of laborers stood so near that David could distinguish their flattened profiles against the torchlight in the thin white steam of mountain exhalations, and could plainly tell one man from another as they toiled and shifted. It was the more strange, therefore, to see, vastly menacing above and beyond their preoccupation, the stilted giants fighting that vague war of shadows.

Four dull booming notes, in slow succession,

rose through the clouds to remind him. A time-log, beaten in one of those drowned villages far below, was thumping out the hour.

"Time to get ready," thought the young man; and turning promptly, he rounded the clump of lilies, regained his bull-hide sandals, and once more headed for his bath.

He had long stood by his window, dressed and helmeted, and was beginning to fidget with his watch, when along the drive came a quick patter of little hoofs and a rumble of wheels. The coachman in the vermilion lacquer hat, perched high on a vehicle of Brobdingnag, pulled up his Lilliputian horses at the door of Miss Arnot's room. Barefoot servants scurried out with luggage; Chatra came swaying, her arms full of wraps, to stand humbly and languidly by the carriage step; then quickly, with a light, firm tread, her mistress followed across the veranda, and entered the leathern gulf of the "mylord."

"Good-morning!" The girl, answering David's salute, looked up with a pale, sad, yet friendly countenance, to where he stood beside a pillar. In white from helmet to point of toe, she wore at her throat some black thing, which in the lamplight seemed hardly darker than her eyes. "Thank you for sending this."

She raised from her lap, and let fall again, the small packet tied with party-colored twine.

"I can never thank you enough," she continued, "for the offer you made me last night. We shall meet at the train? I 've a great many questions to ask you."

David, replying, found his confusion divided. He rejoiced to meet her brave and steady look; but still more, to find that not even the silver locket contained her likeness in the world.

"Your carriage follows mine?" she asked.

"Directly." As he answered, David suddenly discovered, to his annoyance, that down the whole length of the veranda no sign appeared of his own carriage. "My villains will soon be along——"

Miss Arnot smiled and nodded. The coachman wagged his conical vermilion headpiece, lifted his reins, and cracked his gilt fishing-rod like a rifle. "*Hrri! hrri!*" he cried. And before the servants ended their salaams, the four little Sandalwoods jumped forward at a gallop.

As the portly carriage swept out of lamplight into darkness, a nimble figure in a golden-bowl hat and mottled *sarong* hopped up into the rumble. It was only Miss Arnot's groom, who had stood hidden, apparently, in the shadow of the leaders. Yet something in the hurried motion caught David's eye, and for a moment left him staring after, down the dark incline.

A moment only: the young man had no thought of being left behind.

"Sidin!" He turned on his boy. "Sidin, where are my horses? Where are they? Run quickly. My horses. Fetch them!"

Like a deer into the bush, Sidin jumped through the bank of lilies, and was off toward the stables, his feet slapping hard and loud along the volcanic path. The noise of the carriage-wheels had died away before his brown face and white jacket again burst the lilies apart, as though he were riding in on surf.

"Master, they come," he reported, smiling. "Your men harness them rapidly. There was error. One of those foolish grooms" — Sidin pointed with his chin, Malay fashion, after the departing equipage — "they carried word to the stables, saying master required no horses to-day, but to-morrow. Now the horses come. All is well."

David smote the pillar with his hand.

"Is it, though?" he asked himself. "I doubt that!"

Distressed, irresolute, he paced a turn or so in the veranda. All seemed far from well. If only he could be sure.

"Run back," he ordered Sidin. "Run to the stables. Tell the men to hurry."

The brown chamberlain bounded away, fleet servant to a generous master. The glossy leaves closed over him. There followed a long delay,

measured by louder peals of crowing from the gamecocks under the clouds, and once by a distant and widespread grumble, or snoring thunder, where some volcano turned over in its sleep. From black, the night was changing to intense and sorrowful blue. Still no horses came for him, while every moment hers carried her farther down the mountain.

"And she's alone in the carriage!" To this fact, as to a magnet, his thoughts now sprang and cohered. "Alone, with that packet in her lap. She thanked me for *sending* it. Why, Chatra came and begged for it! And Chatra sang, and somebody answered. And then he — somebody — ran off toward the stables. And *then* my horses were not wanted to-day!"

The summary was all too plain. At its conclusion, David found himself in the driveway, straining his eyesight toward where the stables lay hidden behind dark masses of rattan.

"Why don't they come?" he raged. Minute after minute was slipping by, with no sound from the stables. By this time, Miss Arnot's carriage would have doubled the first great spur, and be winding back on the next level below. She was getting a long start. "Too long. Much too long. — Why don't they bring those horses!"

David got nothing from his scrutiny of the dark. The volcano growled no longer, the shrill

fit of cock-crow had died away; so that through a fresh matin stillness there mounted what might have been the crunching rattle of wheels.

"There she goes, now!" David cleft the lily-hedge once more, and stumbled down into the path.

No sooner had he leaned out from the leafy embrasure of the hill, than he observed a wide and striking alteration in the abyss. The road-menders remained at work; their fasces of bamboo splints clustered, as before, in streamers of murky flame; the clouds prolonged their motionless yet troubled surface, their milk-white counterpane, quilted with puffy swellings and dimples. Dawn still quivered, hesitated, on the rim of the world. Close underneath, curving with the mighty curve of the mountain flank, the road still gleamed like a tawny fish-hook, its barb bent down and buried among formless trees and shadows. Yet the aspect of all this nether scene had changed. There had been shrinkage.

For a time, the watcher was perplexed. Then at a flash, he saw how the whole warfare of silhouettes had ended, declined, and left the upper air at peace.

Close above the coolies' heads, a thick white billow of mist had rolled up, blank and solid as a wall, and impending with a face nearly as vertical. Caught by the interposition of this screen,

the hill-men's shadows now waged a tumult more sharply defined, more near and black and intelligible, though not less than colossal, even in reduction. The crawling mist had withered the war of gods into a labor of titans.

On all this David cast a negligent eye, for his ear was not yet satisfied. Up from the lighted pit came only a scraping of shovels, and a slow thud of tamping-rods. At last, however, grinding through these noises, the carriage-wheels drew nearer and nearer, down a sharp declivity on the left.

The coolies peered up hill, shouted commands to each other, gave here and there a final hurried thump to the repairs, and, catching up their torches, dodged across the road. As men and flambeaux vanished under the base of David's battlement, so the whole pantomime of shadows took flight. The torches, now ranged out of sight below the bank, threw into white relief the opposing cloud-wall, and lighted the empty road with fitful, streaming glory, as for a procession of barbaric royalty.

The procession was slow in coming; but presently the four Sandalwood ponies descended into view, stepping gingerly on the loosened earth, and picking their way. Points of metal flickered on their harness. The coachman's red hat shone as though wet with fresh blood, and his long whip

glistened in a drooping curve. Miss Arnot remained invisible. David caught only a glimmer from white linen, where she leaned back in the deep recess of the carriage.

Instantly, parallel with their descent, a black extravagance towered into action: along the rearing cloud, as on a marble screen, tossed the intense and magnified shadows of horses' heads; the coachman's lifted fists clutching a web of reins, his flat nose, beneath his conical hat, rose next and slanted downward, tall as a tree; then a huge radiation of spokes revolved through an arc wider than a windmill's. The body of the carriage passed in a bulk of silhouette, without form.

And then David, watching, had called aloud; for what came last came incredible, like a portent in the heavens.

Drawn slowly across the shining cloud, appeared the giant similitude of a face. Even in the wavering projection of that stupendous scale, it was a face well known and startling. The rounded nose, the thick lips parted in a smile, were not to be mistaken.

"Rosario!" cried the young man from his hilltop; and again in wonder and dismay, "Rosario!"

The black portrait blurred like a column of smoke, as the native groom, perching in the rumble, suddenly turned his head.

CHAPTER IX

DOWN HILL

THAT was enough. What David saw, below, had neither sense nor connection; but as he shouted the name, the figure in the rumble had started, turned its head, and caused Rosario's likeness to melt from the cloud.

"It was! It is!" repeated the young man, seeing in a daze the carriage go lumbering past the repairs, gather headway, and spin round the fish-hook bend of the road.

"Master, your horses," murmured Sidin, at his elbow. "Your horses are at the door."

David caught the native by the sleeve, and pointed down hill.

"Quickly!" he cried in the vernacular. "I must run after them. Quickly! How?"

The brown chamberlain kept a level head. Upward, over his shoulder, he flung the command:—

"Coachman! Follow us by the road! Gallop!"

Downward, with a jerk of the chin, he indicated a gap in the foliage.

"This way, master. Follow me."

He flung himself recklessly over the precipice, as it seemed, and was gone. David swung after, fell his own height, landed ankle-deep in soft earth, and went, ploughing an almost perpendicular furrow down the mountain-side. His helmet flew off into the night, like a clumsy bird. Below him the whiteness of Sidin's jacket slid with amazing velocity toward the torchlight, in a luminous cloud of reddish dust. Along with both men, and from behind, rolled and bounded many small round things, as though the mountain had let slip an avalanche of skulls or lively cannon balls. Once David snatched at the appearance of a bush, which came up loose in his hand, with the facility of a dream; and as he shot down toward the glare of the flambeaux, he found, in passing astonishment, that this thing he brandished was a potato-stalk. He flung it away, dug both hands deep into the sliding dust, and so retarded, fell unhurt over a bank between the torch-bearers. Turnips, carrots, and other half-recognized European vegetables fell with him, showering from the uprooted garden.

Sidin hauled him to his feet, crying, as before: "This way, master!"

Through jostling torches, the two men ran straight on across the road, and jumped down from the glare into a drenching darkness of rattans, among which they tumbled in a blind, trans-

verse descent. A path seemed to slant and dodge drunkenly underfoot. By turns David ran, fell without warning, rolled, gained his footing, dove through rattans as through torn paper, rose from all-fours, and ran down the mountain again in flying leaps and bounds. He cared nothing when he fell, seeing clearly that by this breakneck course he should soon drop once more upon the meandering road. Now and then, in a bit of clearing, he shook the dew from his eyes and saw overhead, where clouds were parting, the still, blue, swimming light of day.

He weltered through a green surge of stag-horn ferns, when Sidin clutched him aside from a hidden brink.

"There!" cried the boy.

Mylord and ponies stood motionless in the road, under their very noses. Two orange lamps glowed brightly in a kind of slanting dell.

Miss Arnot's voice rose, clear and cool as a part of the morning stillness.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," she declared. "Go back to your place!"

A softer voice replied, in half-audible persuasion. It came from the farther side of the carriage, where a golden-bowl hat glimmered vaguely. The rumble showed vacant. The groom, it seemed, — Rosario, or the likeness of Rosario, — stood pleading by the step.

"Nonsense!" the girl retorted sharply. "Drive on, coachman. This fellow is impudent."

The driver, whether or not he understood, sat on his box like a statue.

"Drive on!" repeated her resolute voice.

And then, while David slid crashing down the bank, she had cried out in surprise. The golden bowl bobbed up, a white sleeve shot into the carriage, snatched, and whipped back. David sprang to the nearer step just as the groom leaped down from the farther, and scurried for the bushes.

"Oh!" cried Miss Arnot, in a mixture of indignation and relief. She raised her hands toward David, showing them empty. "See! He took it — what you gave me!"

"I'll get it back," panted the rescuer; and ducking under her ponies' heads, he ran toward the place where the groom had jumped down into the foliage.

Half-way, David regained his common-sense, pulled up short in the road, and faced about.

"You're more important than that thing," he asserted. "We must let it go. I can't leave you here."

The white figure leaning from the mylord gave a little gesture of disappointment.

"I'm perfectly safe."

David stood in a quandary.

"With that coachman? — He disobeys you.

And your maid there is in it, I suspect." He ground his fists together. "I can't — I can't leave you behind, alone."

A bedraggled but calm little person stood before him.

"Master, here am I." Sidin, the forgotten, smiled pleasantly in the twilight. Like all natives, he could follow the pantomime of white strangers. "Allow me that driver's kriss, and I will guard."

David gave a chuckle of content.

"Sidin, you're a brick." He ran to the front wheel, jerked the coachman by the ankle, and cried up at him fiercely, —

"Give this man your kriss!"

The driver stared in cunning stupidity, then folded down a sash devoid of weapons, and grinned. But quick as a cat, Sidin was already climbing the spokes, and in a trice had pulled from under the box-cushion a carved hilt embedded in a wooden sheath.

"*Abis!*" he grunted, thrusting the kriss into his own sash. "Ready, master. I guard. Drive on, *kalang!* — thou lying chew-bacon!"

Once more, but now smiling, David turned to the white figure in the shadow.

"You can trust this boy Sidin," he began. "Shall I go —"

"Oh, please!" she urged. "If you can. — It was *his.* Gerald sent it to me."

"Good; I will. Drive ahead, Sidin."

With two strides and a plunge, David had lost her, and was aware only of darkness, of wet earth sliding with him, of wet ferns that fetched away in a tangle, and of wet rattan scratching his face with many drooping points. Then came a sharp anxiety, as he rose from hands and knees, to listen through the underbrush. Which way might be Rosario's? This perpendicular jungle was all alike in the gloom, a vague wet forest, scented powerfully with sulphur from the furrow his boot-heels left in volcanic earth, and with a pungent aroma, like that of camomile, from torn shrubs.

"Which way?" thought David. It was maddening to consider, while he listened, that below somewhere the thief meantime made flying strides down the mountain. No way but down; yet that way meant a score of different directions — to left, to right, or straight ahead — with no trail in the dark.

"Useless!" he grunted. And overcome by this aspect of his chase, he began to clamber down slowly and mechanically, intending to regain the road and await her carriage on its next long tack through the woods.

Within three steps, however, he was running and tumbling again in the soaked undergrowth. A new motive possessed him, not to be denied, — a chill fury which took the place of reason, resolve,

or guiding purpose. What had she said? "It was his." It was his, this needle in a haystack. It was for him, the godlike young stranger buried in a palm grove among a labyrinth of distant islands, that she wished this turmoil to continue. Gerald — Gerald was the name; always, at every turn, Gerald. For a time, as David fell crashing downward, the unworthy despair sat heavy on him, like a weight upon his shoulders. Then by degrees he threw this off and ran free, urged by a better impulse, a dogged loyalty to his own lost cause. And at last, when he scrambled out all unexpectedly on the next level of the road, he confronted a sight at which hope sprang up afresh, and with hope, the full ardor of a sportsman for the chase.

This new reach of highway was not empty. The azure dawn revealed, close at hand, a little knot of burden-bearers. Above them reared two shapes on horseback. A well-fed Chinaman, in silks of a pale and vernal green, sat resting his pony for the climb. With huge diamonds in her ears, his best wife waited beside him, her slant eyes fixed on her saddlebow in conscious propriety.

"Baba," said David, saluting. "Baba, have you seen a man pass?"

The plump equestrian merchant nodded courteously. His eyes twinkled with the ready humor

of one who had overlooked few details in a busy life.

"Sir," he answered, sharpening the low Malay with his Chinese brogue, "sir, a man ran down into the road as you have run."

"Which way then, Baba?"

"A thief: I said so." The sumptuous horseman nodded in satisfaction. His black eyes brightened with an approving light. "A thief. He wore at his girdle a *sirih* bag, and stopped to put something inside it. Then he ran so." And the Chinaman jerked his thumb toward a pointed arch of bamboo, below the road.

"I thank you, Baba," cried David heartily, as he swung down again into the dusky forest.

Here, though he left daylight behind, his race was not so encumbered. Now and then he struck the jointed pillar of a bamboo, and recoiled with aching ribs; but underfoot the ferns and wiry creepers had given way to short tough grass and herbs, on a convex slope which tilted less violently down to the next ravine. Dodging and doubling like a half-back through a crowded field, David made such speed that the brushing of his passage stirred the leaves continuous as a wind.

Presently, even while he galloped, this steady rustling surprised him by its magnitude. He seemed to disturb the very treetops, like a giant. And why did the noise precede him in a whisper-

ing rush that grew louder and louder, as though the invisible spur of the mountain, ahead, reverberated his echoes throughout the cool, deep morning?

A running volley of squeaks, of cries half smothered among leaves and switching branches, began to answer his question. Below him, the feathery heads of a little grove drooped in the dawn, without a breath to sway them. Yet straight across their surface went a narrow swath of motion, a single wave where the bamboo fronds violently tossed. Black imps appeared and disappeared through this arboreal tumult, pawing and elbowing like swimmers who romp in a green surf.

"Monkeys," thought the runner. "My friends of last night. The bush-apes."

And then he understood their commotion. It traveled far below him, but in a straight line. The black and hairy tribe could neither gambol so fast, nor keep up such a derisive squabble, unless they, too, were giving chase.

"It's Rosario. They're following him." The discovery sent David thundering faster down the slope. "My friend, I have your line now! — I've got him, by Darwin and Hanuman!"

So, following the revel of the apes where they swam through their leafy element, he shot out of the woods, across the road again, and down

through another hanging forest. A path, well beaten, swerved suddenly to join his course. Now he ran with speed redoubled, exulting; for on either hand the mountain dropped through an impenetrable net of *lianas*, pierced only by this path. No choice of direction: even here the tough serpentine creepers had been chopped with difficulty, and their loose ends dangled close and heavy, like cordage cut away in shipwreck. Rosario might not choose but stay in the path.

Now, also, David could fall into that long, skipping step which devours the ground, and which, to down-hill running, imparts a joy like the joy of flight. He drank the fragrant air before him. His descent outstripped the descent of morning, and left it lingering far above on the mountain peaks; for once, over a cleared terrace, he shot past a cluster of woven huts all punctured with ruby points of light, and showing — a night-piece in transparency — the black shapes of mountaineers huddled round a brazier, like an arrested puppet-show inside a great basket, lighted by a handful of coals. The sight recalled to David, as he ran, that other plaited hut in a palm grove, at dawn. He passed an embowered hamlet all asleep, except for its white-bearded chieftain, who in ghostly robe stood smoking pensively a long cigarette before his gate, revolving statecraft for his family of neighbors. And

next, overhead, the bush-apes perched like dim clusters of uneasy fruit, their chattering silenced and their fickle interest gone. After that, a fleeting impression of sounds buried among the trees: drums beat in feeble monotony, and scattered choirs — of many voices, from many places, but one in key and rhythm — chanted the Koran of the Prophet, to greet the day. Down into a waking valley the path sped like an arrow, and David with it.

"Rot!" He slid to a standstill, blockaded; for suddenly another path forked before him, down to the left. And this time there appeared neither Chinaman nor monkey to point the way. David stood alone on an open scar of red earth.

Far off, above the wooded belt where *chimara* tops prolonged their sage-green mist, a range of deep blue Fujiyamas interlocked in jagged profile against the morning. The slant edge of one glowed white-hot, like a steel rail in a foundry. Here and there, aloft in broader incandescence, floating wisps of crater smoke already caught the sunrise. Below, the whole valley lay smothered in cool fog, white as cotton, through which rose palm-heads like tattered islands. The beating of drums, the chanting of the Koran, rose louder from the near edge of this vaporous lake.

"I 've lost him," David grumbled. "Once he gets down into that —"

With strong disfavor, he considered the forking paths. The left branch wound along the crinkled edge of a spur. The right branch tumbled as in a series of cascades, disappeared under the trees, and reappeared, no wider than a ribbon, in a misty clearing.

On this David's glance lingered, without decision. He was still at a loss, when into the clear space darted the figure of a man running. It was the counterfeit groom, and no other; for above his twinkling legs was kilted a *sarong* of many colors, and on his head bobbed a Mambrino's helmet of gold lacquer.

David leaped into the right-hand path. Knowing his own pace, and having seen Rosario's, he felt certain that the pursuit would end within a quarter-mile. Under the trees he dashed, and through the clearing; then, down a wet little path that struggled through reeds and swamp grass, he held the fugitive at last in view.

Both men were now at top speed. David saw the other toss back over his shoulder one quick, startled glance, and then pump hard with tense arms in a desperate endeavor to spurt. But the short legs could ply no faster; the long were gaining.

Ahead, the marshy lane broke open, to end in a white gleam of shallow water. A little mountain lake closed the vista, lying still as a dream

under the rising mist. Beside a ragged jetty of piled stones, in an open-work bamboo pavilion, squatted a gay company of men in colored silks, upholding stiffly a mushroom clump of gilt umbrellas.

Straight past these bounded Rosario, across the tiny sunken jetty, and down, as it seemed, into the water.

David ran up in time to see the fellow shove off frantically with a paddle, glide out from shore, and sitting on the thwart of a dugout, begin to lash the water with stroke upon stroke.

"All right, Rosario!" David called after him, laughing. "Plenty of boats here. We 'll hold a regatta!"

It was not so easy. Before he could reach the other dugouts lying at the end of the jetty, he found himself blocked by an angry swarm of natives, — no common men, but martial aristocrats in gorgeous raiment, with kriss-hilts of chased gold, and proud, courtly faces in which a live passion of anger only heightened the cool and contemptuous dignity.

"Let me pass!" began David impatiently.

"Sir, you shall not!" A slim young patrician, crowned haughtily by a Mussulman's turban of primrose-yellow satin, raised his hand with peremptory grace. "Call back your servant. This lake is forbidden. No man shall pass here."

CHAPTER X

THE LAKE ISLE

"FORBIDDEN?"

"Forbidden, sir." The young Mussulman inclined his primrose turban, but stood firm.

Past his shoulder David could see Rosario flailing the water, with a play of back muscles that wrinkled the white jacket. The dugout swam deep, weighted with a cargo of bilge or rain, which quivered round the robber's feet, and shone like quicksilver. The escape would be slow. It was none the easier to watch.

"Who forbids?" David met stare with stare, coolness with coolness. "Who are you?"

What lay behind such unwonted impudence, he could not guess. But this imperious native spoke like one having authority.

"It matters little who I am," was the calm retort. "My orders matter greatly. This lake is at present forbidden to any man short of Regent or Resident. Call back your servant."

The young man's turban, and the arrogant poise of his head, gave him almost an appearance of being tall and masterful; his face, delicately modeled, and of a brown hardly deeper than

sunburn, shone spirited and threatening; yet a twitching about the lips, a barely perceptible shifting of the eyes, betrayed some anxiety mingled with his boldness. The other natives — all but three who squatted patiently to uphold their gilt umbrellas — had at first flocked out from the pavilion like a bevy of gorgeous and excited parrakeets; but now they stood withdrawn from the jetty, watching their spokesman. Every face showed intent and eager; yet their very eagerness, their unanimous frown of indignation, bore a wavering aspect. The whole band might have been conspirators overtaken.

David saw, and promptly chose his course.

"That man is not my servant, but a thief." He pointed at the paddler laboring in the heavy dugout; then turned upon the strutting chieftain with a calm, well-feigned severity. "I come on the part of one who is far greater than Regent, Resident, or Sultan."

He threw in the final word merely to round his sentence. The effect surprised him.

The comely Mohammedan youth stepped aside, and lowered his primrose turban in a profound bow, his face, meanwhile, transformed by a lively interchange of consternation, anger, and sullen respect.

"Of course you may have a boat, sir." With constrained politeness, he picked his way over

jumbled stones to where the jetty slumped among reeds and shallow water; then waving courteously his slim brown hand, he installed David in the craft which waited there, — a rude catamaran, or fragmentary pontoon, of three dugouts lashed together with *areng* fibre, decked amidships, and covered by a scant awning of palm thatch. "Will two paddlers suffice you, sir? — Amat!" he called ashore; "Amat! Ali! Bring fresh matting for this gentleman, and row him well!"

Two humble natives came running to obey. They hopped aboard, caught up their paddles, and perched on the edge of the catamaran. David, sitting comfortably under the little thatched marquee, was still wondering at this strange and fortunate reversal of policy, when his helper stooped toward him for a parting word.

"If this matter," murmured the quiet voice, "if this should come to the ears of his High —" the man coughed — "of our friend, you will tell him what my attitude was?"

His level tone, his gentle brown eyes, his swarthy face masked with impassive refinement, could not hide the fact that the young Mussulman was worried.

"You will not fail, sir?" he begged. "Above all things, *our friend* wishes not to displease the Nail of the Universe!"

David's nod was benign as a monarch's.

"Be content," he answered.

As the two broad paddles struck the water, he went gliding past the jetty, calm and cross-legged, like a Buddha. Yet fairly launched, he caught himself grinning.

"False pretenses somewhere," he chuckled. "I 'm a friend to his Highness, and dear old chums with the Nail of the Universe!"

Turning, David glanced astern. The proud young chieftain watched him doubtfully, — a splendid figure in the misty light. The still though passionate face, now darkened with perplexity; his glowing turban, his silk skirt patterned in ripples of dull blue and mellow brown, his jeweled hilt in a gold sheath; the man's speech, of purest Malay, — these, but above all, his unaccountable change of front, gave to the whole scene a droll, Arabian air of mystery.

"Can't be helped." David dismissed the puzzle, and faced toward the bow. "False pretenses or not, I 'll catch this fellow."

The chase, indeed, would soon be over. Off the port bow, a thin white smoke drifted to join a rolling cumulus bank of vapor. Elsewhere the lake stretched in shallow, aerial blue under the sunrise. The fugitive's gleaming head-piece rose and fell with every beat of his paddle, in a dogged but losing rhythm. His water-logged little *prau*, the black tip of an arrow-head sketched

in faint waves that spread and vanished, drew slowly nearer and nearer. Each time that he twisted on his thwart for a backward glimpse, the dismay graven in his face appeared more legible. David saw the bright drops glitter as he whirled his paddle overhead, and began digging the blade furiously over the other gunwale.

"What 's he doing? He can't mean to turn round?"

Ali, bow paddler, answered the unspoken question.

"*Pulo, Tuan?*" Grunting, the native thrust out his chin to port; then faced about, with a scared look. "The island, Tuan?"

"By all means!" David laughed impatiently. He saw now the meaning of Rosario's latest trick. "By all means; to the island!"

The dugout trailed heavily, like a wounded saurian, straight across their nose, and pointed her own toward the rolling mass of vapors. Out of this, cleaving its way into full sunlight, came as though by its own motion the green wooded bulk of an islet.

"Faster, man, faster!" cried David; for the bow oarsman, after swerving their triple beak in this new direction, slackened his efforts, and turned, as before, with frightened, questioning eyes. "Go on, man! What ails you? To the island!"

"Oh, sir," mourned the fellow. "Oh, sir, do you dare?"

Amat, in the stern, rebuked him harshly.

"Does my lord the crocodile devour shrimps?" he sneered. "Go on, Ali. *We* are safe enough. This gentleman from Europe will take the blame."

The small catamaran once more forged ahead. The mist, now rolling clear of the island, left it stripped of motion, bare to confront the morning, — a lofty clump of green *waringin* foliage, wet and glistening, save where one gigantic top shone leather-brown. A stillness like enchantment brooded upon trees and water.

Why any man in broad daylight could dread a landfall on so innocent a bit of grove, floating so peacefully in a lake pale and tranquil as the sky, David could not guess; the fact had neither probability nor motive, and seemed, like that queer embargo at the jetty, some freak of child's play; and yet, while he measured the distance between craft, and to the shore, he felt a transient wonder which was half disquietude. A forbidden lake; a pair of boatmen, one frightened and one grim; a "Nail of the Universe," who must not be roused to anger, — these figments took on a sudden reality, here in the splendor of the tropic morning, before this dense peak of isolated forest charmed into fairy stillness.

It was no time, however, for subtleties or rid-

dles. David could hear Rosario panting at each stroke, the bilge-water swashing fore and aft to the same rhythm.

"Stop!" called Ali, in a sort of choking dismay. "Stop there!"

At his cry, as if obeying, the dugout grounded. Half-tumbling, half-leaping, Rosario was overboard, ankle-deep, ran splashing among reeds to the shore, took the low bank at a bound, and hurled himself through the bushes, out of sight.

David's pontoon rushed softly into the sludge. Before he could rise from his mat, the two natives had flung down their paddles, sprung ashore, and snatched off their varicolored turbans. Then each man, with his arms behind his back, wound the gay cotton tightly round both fists, and struck a posture of submission.

"*Ampun Tuan-ku*," they wailed in unison, standing self-bound like a pair of captives; "*beribu-ribu ampun!*—Pardon, my lord, a thousand-thousand pardons!"

Their entreaty rose, melodious and mournful, from the water's edge. No voice replied. Again they called, as though imploring the empty air, or some invisible genius of the shore. A family of lizards, sunning themselves on the dewy bank, scuttled off among dead leaves. Rosario's rustling passage through the bush had ceased like the dying of a wind. Reflected sunshine, rippling up

from the troubled margin of the lake, played oozily across the green banyan covert. The island returned to its dreaming.

"*Ampun, Tuan-ku!*" crooned the boatmen, side by side; and twisting their ligatures afresh, bent their bare heads in the presence of nothing but water, trees, and the brilliant morning.

Plainly, this pair of suppliants would stir no farther. And of a sudden it came strongly upon David that he, alone, must penetrate this enigmatic bush, and with bare hands capture a thief who would certainly be armed, and more certainly in hiding, ready, at bay.

He snatched up the bow paddle, and jumped ashore; then, twirling the great blade lightly, he caught the balance, and took firm grip of the haft.

"Anyhow," he decided, "I can spank him!"

He climbed the bank, but paused to consider. Rosario had gone to cover straight ahead, through those branches. Were it not better, then, to steal roundabout, meet ambush with détour, and surprise the lurker from behind?

"He's lying doggo, somewhere. Kriss — or gun, perhaps — against this paddle of mine: that's giving odds. We'll do a 'hike.' Here goes."

Turning a flank of solid greenery, David set foot in a wider recess of the shore, a tiny crescent of tender grass curving between grove and lake.

He stood in his tracks, and stared, and forgot his errand.

The isle contained another visitor.

Over the turf lay spread a glorious rug, on which knelt a young man, praying. With his back turned on the sunrise, he was bowing toward Mecca, in the west. As he fell prostrate, his shadow shrank home beneath him; as he rose again to his knees, it darted at full length across the lawn. A pair of sandals, very small, and of rich leather, stood at the edge of the carpet; and beside them glistened a kriss in a heavy golden scabbard, with a golden hilt in which great uncut rubies caught the sunshine like drops of fire. Sombre to his waist, the stranger wore a black fez encircled with some verse from the Koran in Arabic letters of gold thread, and a plain, close-fitting jacket of black silk; but from his waist to his powerful, slim ankles flowed a *sarong* miraculous in its blending of soft colors.

At sight of this, David understood why his boatmen had quailed. The pattern on the *sarong* was a variant of the Fighting Deer, worn by no man but of the blood royal.

Raja, prince, king, whatever the man was, he continued his devotions. A slight rustle of silks, and now and then a fervent whisper, were the only sounds in this mosque of green leaves.

At last the stranger quietly rose, thrust his deli-

cate brown feet into the little sandals, took up the golden kriss, and slowly turned. His deliberate, haughty movement brought a transformation almost dazzling. The priest became a warrior; for the whole front of his black silk jacket glittered with martial frogs and loops embroidered in gold. On his uplifted fez the verse from the Koran shone like a challenge.

"*Wanneer kwam je?*" The question came swift and threatening. His Highness, for a Malay, stood very tall in his sandals. A wondrous pair of eyes, angry and beautiful, blazed from under his feminine lashes. Every line in his face — nostrils, brows, dark-red lips — every line quivered in a curve, at once dainty and perilous. He frowned. "*Wanneer kwam je?*"

David, conscious of muddy legs, wet, frowzled hair, and clothes everywhere stained with green grass, made his best bow.

"I regret, Your Highness," he replied, "that I have disturbed your devotions; also that I cannot speak Dutch."

The stranger's face grew brighter.

"No more can I, really." He smiled, like a lonesome boy who has found a playmate. "English? I 'm very glad to hear the sound of it." He frowned again. "You have n't anything to do, have you, with these Dutch officials? Please tell me frankly."

"Nothing in the world, sir," David answered. "I am a traveler. I happen to be chasing a robber, who took refuge here on your island."

His Highness frowned no longer, but nodded like a man well satisfied, not to say relieved.

"This is very interesting." He spoke with quiet alacrity, and smiled again, the same youthful, engaging smile. "We shall have sport, after all. The robber is hiding here now?"

At the outset of their interview, he had thrust the golden scabbard under his sash, and with punctilious care, had turned the ruby hilt at a pacific angle. Now he twisted it outward, ready to his hand.

"This will be good sport," he declared. "I have been frightfully bored. Let us go beat the cover."

He bowed in slight and not ungracious condescension, turned, and led the way across the little amphitheatre of grass. Where ponderous foliage overhung, they gained the mouth of an alley floored with moss.

"Pooh!" The royal man-hunter halted suddenly, and tossed his fez with a quick, scornful motion of the head. "Is *this* the fellow? Pooh! He's not dangerous, I fancy — not worth our trouble!"

Out of the lane, his thick lips set in an ill-favored smirk, his eyes bold as the brazen shin-

ing of his lacquered hat, swaggered Rosario. In the dress and with all the saucy manner of a groom, he was puffing a long palm-sheathed cigarette.

"Good-morning, gentlemen!" The late fugitive, now at ease, blew out a wreath of smoke, and grinning broadly, watched it loiter upward in the sunlight. "Ah, my word, you know, what an extraordiny jolly little spot for us to be meeting in!"

CHAPTER XI

THE WRITTEN STONE

THE splendid stranger drew back, gathering his pictured skirt in folds, as though to save the Battle of Deer from all ignoble contact.

"Who is this fellow?" Questioning David, he stared over Rosario's head, with a smile that was half disgust, half-languid amusement. "If this — er — specimen is European, he will remove his hat; if Asiatic, his boots!"

Rosario made no motion, but stood unabashed, smirking and smoking.

"I'll show you, sir!" David gripped the shoulder of this too affable culprit, and holding him tightly, ransacked the *sirih* bag at his waist, jerked away his sash and shook it, pulled off his golden hat and head-kerchief underneath. The scuffle bore no result, beyond a squeak of indignant terror from Rosario, and a cry of rage from David.

"He's thrown it away!" exclaimed the captor, and flung the captive aside, revengefully.

Stooping, Rosario picked up his scattered apparel, put it on, adjusted all to a nicety, and began hunting for his cigarette throughout the grass.

"I am still in the dark," observed his Highness, not without asperity. "Thrown what away?"

"What he stole. What I was after." With the eloquence of defeat, David poured out a fiery explanation. "There!" he concluded. "The last time I saw this fellow, he was playing white man and sugar-planter; now he's playing *sais*. Anyhow he's a thief, who bribes coachmen and maid-servants to rob ladies on the highway. He got away with that packet. I saw him. And the Chinaman saw, when he stuffed it into his betel kit. And now he 's hidden it!"

Rosario, having found his cigarette by the smoke, pounced on it like a jackdaw, caught it up, and waved it in graceful deprecation.

"What nonsense, gentlemen!" he interrupted soothingly. "Ah by Jove, now, what nonsense! Be-cause, Mr. Bowman, you have not one bally bit of proof, have you, to show at present moment? By force of muscle, you may dislocate and ruff my clothes all day. But *that* proves nothing, and besides is jolly bad form. Ha ha!"

The royal figure, erect in his gold-emblazoned tunic, had watched both the speakers as calmly as though holding a court martial. Now he bestowed on David a hardly perceptible nod, and let his curved eyelids droop in restrained but quizzical comprehension.

"Of course I believe *you*," he murmured, aside.

David thanked him with a bow.

"That 's all very well," struck in Rosario pertly. "Nothing but speak-so! It is merely — ah — testament by hear-tell!"

The unknown prince ignored this chatter, and seemed lost in mournful thought. Suddenly his eyes grew brighter. Raising his head, he appeared to listen after some far-off sound.

"I am not so sure of that," he murmured in soliloquy. "There, I think, is proof enough. Hark!"

Somewhere beyond the shores of the lake, a hurried staccato drumming, hollow but dead, deep without resonance, came nearer, swelled fitfully in scattered relays, and for a time filled the countryside. From gardo to gardo along the roads, watchmen were beating on their time-logs the rapid alarm which proclaims a robber at large. The message, startling the whole valley from mountain to mountain with a sort of wooden thunder, recalled to David, curiously, the drumming of myriad partridges in his northern woods, at home. Station to station, village to village spread the alarm, each log echoing loudly to the next, — "Robbery — robbery — a robbery!"

"There it goes!" cried David. "That boy Sidin found time to pass the word. What do you say now, Rosario?"

The fellow said nothing, for a time, but only

tilted his golden hat and stood listening, like a robin after worms. The morning air throbbed and rumbled accusations, that compassed him about. His thick lips never lost their smirk, or his lustrous, dilated eyes their look of ready cunning.

"What do I say?" he mocked. Then, twirling his cigarette in supple fingers, he stood and listened roguishly. "What I say? O my dear chaps, I am not easy to be strike dumb!"

Plainly, he was nursing some joke, — a secret which tickled his fancy, and with which he was loath to part.

The dull hubbub of the alarm traveled, dividing and spreading until it was hushed in distance.

"Ha ha!" Rosario suddenly wheeled on his foes, a brisk and beaming malignant. "Now, then, gentlemen! Now I say it. Your brain are very slow. You think, now all the villages, all the hills know what I have done. Good! You think, now you have catched me! Ah my word, you suppose *my* mind is slow interior like yours. No, gentlemen!" Rosario grinned, like a pampered child brimming with self-esteem. "Ah, no! It is nimble, very, very nimble interior is my mind. Now see it. You give me for the custody, to some Dutchman with the great pad-belly of rice, and shave head. Very well."

He wheeled, menacingly, on the stranger.

"And you," he cried in triumph; "it is very

well, also, for you to stand so proud, looking through my poor body so transparently. You! Ho ho! Come, *give* me to the Dutch officer! Give! And me, what do I say? I only say, 'Look, Dutchman: here in your district, here on this island, is not less a person than his Highness the Sultan of —' "

"Stop there!" Without a gesture, the haughty and emblazoned Malay cut short this tirade. His face remained calm, but for an instant his wonderful eyes burned yet more wonderful, in anger and contempt. "You have said enough. Go back to your stables!"

Rosario doffed his gleaming hat in mockery.

"Thank you so much," he chuckled. "I shall go when I — ah — when I jolly well please." Replacing the bowl on top of his mottled kerchief, he snapped its band under his chin as daintily as a girl; then stood at ease, one arm akimbo, the other holding out at full length his cigarette, which he studied with pert sagacity, through half-closed eyes. "Suppose," he slowly continued, "suppose we make bargain? Your Highness never mentions me, let us say. Good! I engage, of my part, no word shall reach the Nail of the Universe. Come, now?"

The young Sultan, whatever place he governed, could govern his own temper.

"Sir," — with an air of extreme weariness, he

turned quietly to David,—"I am not well used to dealing with the coolie class of half-breeds. Neither are you, I dare say. How shall we tell this stable parrot that we have not the slightest wish to trade or bargain with it?"

David came forward with savage alacrity.

"I'll get you rid of him, sir." He caught Rosario by the wrist, and jerking him out of his fine attitude, dragged him headlong round the screen of foliage, to the bank where he had landed. "Now then! You see your boat. Get aboard, and go!"

In a babble of protestations, Rosario went spinning down among the reeds, flung by the outstretched arm like a heaved lead. He sprawled on his face before the two boatmen, who had suddenly dropped on their knees at the water's edge.

Rosario scrambled to his feet, cursing volubly. But Amat and Ali, kneeling bareheaded in the sun, remained oblivious to his outcry, nor looked up until another voice addressed them from the bank.

"Boatmen!" Their Sultan spoke as one who did not stoop to reprimand. "Boatmen, that person on this island is your only disgrace. Remove it."

The pair sprang up, light-footed, to earn their pardon. Unbinding their hands from the *ikat-diri,* they bowed low together.

"Remove him to the shore," repeated the Sultan. "Give him to my guards. Let him not escape."

Without staying to see his order executed, the speaker beckoned to David, and turned calmly away.

"If you don't mind?" he said, with a friendly smile.

Side by side they reëntered the privacy of the little lawn, passed the riot of glorious colors where the prayer-rug lay, and halted, face to face in the warm and fragrant recess. The two men were a good pair. Courtly poise, and warlike habit of authority, made the Sultan's presence a fair match for David's stature. Each regarded the other with the same smile of humorous annoyance, on the common level of perplexity.

"Do you know," began the prince, "that fellow really had us. He's put me in a most vexing position."

"I 'm sorry, Your Highness," replied David. "Sincerely."

"Oh, as to that —" The other waved his trouble aside; then, with an impulse both frank and shy, he put forth his hand. "I like your ways. Mr. — Mr. Bowman? So, I believe, that little ass called you?"

David laughed, and shook hands.

"But," continued the quiet voice, "I do wish

you 'd drop all those beastly 'sirs' and 'highnesses.' If you could guess how deadly dull — Well, my life 's made a burden, with — what do you call it again? — ceremony! *Adat* here, *adat* there! Oh, ceremony!" And the Sultan, with a whimsical groan which ended in a laugh, wagged his head ruefully, like a brown Henry V. "Ceremony! — Suppose I call you Bowman: will you call me plain Rama? Let 's talk simply, you know. Of course, my real name is Sri Rama Vicrama Sangsaperba, Souria Alem, and so on; and I'm sultan of — no matter — a place you never heard of, up north, across the Line."

David, bowing, smiled with sudden enlightenment. All the while his memory had been groping and striving; and now he recalled where, many months ago, many miles away, he had seen this olive countenance with its curved lines, by turns so mobile and so impassive, so clouded in mournful pride or alight with boyish pleasure.

"If you wish it," he replied. "As a matter of fact, though, I could name your kingdom up there. I saw you once, *not* incognito. Do you remember, at the Hongkong races, an ugly little gray gelding named Chop-Chop?"

The Sultan widened his great eyes. He gave a subdued cry.

"Remember?" His laugh sounded like a mellow bell. "*My* Chop-Chop? Why, that pony

beat Bintang, my roan stallion, by half a head! Never enjoyed a better surprise in my life! Remember? I *bought* Chop-Chop next day, just for that. Happy Valley meeting, two years ago." All clouds had left the Sultan's face. He talked in a low, even, melodious cadence, too polite for eagerness; but his curved lips quivered gleefully, and his fine white teeth flashed. "I bought the horse from a little chap — let me see — a little chap named Pryce."

"Right." David joined his laugh, for the royal animation was catching. "I got Pryce that pony, from the North of China, — snapped him out of a herd of griffins."

His companion flung dignity and custom so far to the winds as to pat him on the elbow.

"No! Did you?" The ruler of men had vanished; in his place stood a delighted lover of horses. "You discovered my Chop-Chop? You can always be proud of that! — I say, Bowman, you'll have to stay over with me, down here, and see me through this affair. I was being bored flat. You *must* stay!"

Sri Rama Vicrama had somehow, quietly and decorously, slipped his black silken cuff, heavy with crusted gold, under David's plain sleeve of white drill; and with the same gentle insistence, had begun pressing forward, to where the alley of moss opened among the leaves.

At the risk of discourtesy, David hung back.

"I'm afraid," he protested, "that we must n't forget. The robbery, you see, and this fellow Rosario. You said — He can place you in a trying position?"

His companion unlocked arms, halted, and swore a round oath by the name of the Prophet.

"Can? The beggar has, already!" His Highness remained silent for a time, frowning at the sunlit water. "Horses," he declared, from out this meditation, "horses drive everything else out of my head, you know." Presently he turned, with a negligent but gracious air, inviting David to follow. "Come inside here, till I show you this matter."

Erect and lithe, with a swaying gait in which every movement was a piece of regal composure, he entered the gap in the *waringin* grove, and began slowly to thread a winding path among the branches. David came after, wondering. Sandals and boots alike trod silently in deep moss, delicate as peach-bloom, inimitably green. The pleasant odor of the moss, at each bruising footfall, rose like virtue under adversity, in the immemorial comparison; and through it, steeping the cool heart of the wood, drifted the alluring smell of fresh water, and all those dewy fragrances which hover about fresh water, — from roots, from small hidden blossoms, from leaves long chilled

by the night, and now stirring in early sunlight.

"Here," said the Sultan, after a final turn of the maze. "One moment, please."

It seemed as fitting as an act of ritual, that he should lower his voice, and that, pausing where the moss spread wide in the green carpet of a fairy ring, he should put off the sandals from his feet. The two men faced a circular bower, walled with heavy leaves, among which twined and twisted, like bootlaces and torn basket-work, long creepers and banyan roots all furred with brilliant moss. The place contained three things: a mixture of light and shadow as mottled as the Deer Fight on the Sultan's skirt; a huge bundle of mossy pillars, great and small contorted alike, where an aged banyan reared its trunk; and close under this, coated with the same living green, the long, low mound of a grave.

"Here," continued the Sultan, quietly as before, "is the tomb of my ancestor."

Behind his back, David, with the awkwardness of a Western barbarian, was tugging off his boots. The speaker turned, and caught him in the act.

"I did n't expect that." The heavy Malayan lips parted in a smile, but not of ridicule. The liquid Malayan eyes conveyed more than the words. "I — Well, I'll remember it, Bowman."

Silent again, they stood beside each other in the woodland sepulchre. Overhead, a fitful series of squeaks, petulant and evil, disturbed their solitude. David, looking up into the sunlight, saw the banyan top shining leathery-brown aloft. What, from the lake, he had taken for dead leaves on a blasted tree, was a sleeping multitude of flying-foxes, that hung head downward in ponderous hanks and bundles. It was strange to see, against the blue sky, a pinnacle of arborescence that was not vegetable, but animal.

"They won't overhear us." The Sultan glanced up at the giant bats, with a smile; then lowering his eyes, regarded soberly the mound below the banyan pillars. "And I can trust you. So here 's my secret." He pointed at the grave. "What do you see there?"

The burial-place was ancient, for even in that profound shelter its contour showed sunken, worn by the attrition of years. Midway, a slight convexity heaved the moss, — the outline of a round stone, like a buckler smoothly covered with green velvet.

"A stone," replied David.

The Sultan nodded his fez.

"A stone," he echoed. "That stone is written upon, like the Batu Tulis; but not with the cursed inscription of idolaters. It lies above my great ancestor, Sri Rama Vicrama, called the Sultan

Muda, Who Held the World on his Knees; king of an old country 'under the wind,' as we say. He swept the idolaters from the face of this land, with Raden Patah, many lifetimes ago."

He paused. A flying-fox, jostled from its high dormitory, fell with a snarling cry, caught some lower branch, and swayed to rest in a subsiding flutter.

"Every third year, on this day, at sunrise, his descendant comes to the island, and turns the stone. No matter from how far. The moss will be dead, you see, from the under side, and withered. So all men living by this lake, when they look on the bare face of the stone, may know that the sons of Sri Rama Vicrama live and remember; and that the true Sultan has come at his appointed time."

The speaker's face glowed with sombre pride.

"For in their hearts," he added, "secretly, in their hearts, I am their true Sultan."

The flying-foxes, overhead, measured another interval with a faint squeak or two, a fainter rustling among the high leaves. When young Rama spoke, his voice trembled with rising anger.

"Not one of them would speak of me, outside. Not one, Bowman. They all know I am here, and they are glad. But this thief of yours —" He broke off in contempt. "Stable talk is easily

overheard. And now, if your thief goes to the Regent, — to this slave, this Javanese *kalang*, master of concubines, who calls himself the Nail of the Universe — *chiss!*" Rama shook his head, bitterly. "The devil to pay, then! — our little play-actor, the Regent, flaring up among his women here, — complaints, telegrams; a Dutch Resident arriving in all his glory, to play he 's discovered plots and rebellions — Oh, damn them!"

David would have spoken.

"No, no," continued the Sultan, more calmly. "It's not your fault, Bowman. But you see: your stable parrot can make trouble for me. I'm here on the — what you call it? — on the sly."

He considered for a moment, dismissed the matter with a wave of the hand, and fixed his eyes once more upon the grave and its green velvet pall.

"Well," he said tranquilly, "here is the stone to be turned."

He stooped for an obeisance, brief but reverent. Then, removing from a hollow in the moss a votive handful of white frangipani blossoms, he knelt, and began with slim, strong fingers to feel for the circumference of the stone. A singular change crossed his features. He sat upright, rigid from knee to fez.

"Bowman! What dog —" The green light

and shade, flickering in the banyan chapel, shifted curiously on a face gray and still with wrath. "What dog has — " Again he choked. "Do you see? The stone has been — already! Before me — before the time!"

David, though chafing to be gone, had stood by, with no choice but to watch. The Sultan's cry, and that strange look of petrified anger, now brought him quickly beside the mound.

Circling the green buckler of the imbedded stone, ran a tawny line drawn in fresh earth, a crack no wider than a thread.

"What devil did this?" whispered the Sultan to himself, furiously. Furiously bending, he thrust his fingers into the cracked moss, and pried. The red earth gaped. Rama caught a fresh grip, heaved, tugged at full stretch. "What devil — "

The heavy stone, in shape a double convex, tilted and fell clear of its socket, disclosing an under surface bare and brown, chiseled with writing either in Arabic or in Kawi, shallow, yet clear as in the days when the great kingdom Majapahit fell.

"What is this?"

David and Prince Rama stared together, — first into the earthen socket, then at each other, then down again like men who had found a treasure.

Rosario's cunning had its limit. He had not known the story of this grave. The cavity, a deep bowl filled with quivering sunlight and black pattern of leaves, held also a small packet wrapped in manila paper, sealed with red wax.

CHAPTER XII

WAITING

Rama was the first to speak.

"What does that mean?" His eyes were blazing, his cheeks even paler than before. "More insolence from that *sais* of yours?"

He rose with the packet in his hand, and seeing David's involuntary motion to take it, drew back haughtily.

David made a conciliatory gesture.

"My thief," he assented. "Rosario. That is what he stole from the lady. He chose to hide it here."

"Hide it? In the Sultan Muda's grave? Under the Written Stone?" Rama swore in a passionate whisper, and drew breath with a rasping sound. "The dog! Let us go —"

He turned violently, as though to rush out through the banyan corridor; but checking that impulse, flung the packet down among the frangipani blossoms, bent over the grave, lifted the stone, and carefully replaced it in the socket, so that the written side lay uppermost, bare and brown, like a dull scarab set in emerald fur. This

done, he snatched up the offensive packet, and stood erect, breathing hard from anger and exertion.

"There's more about this, Mr. Bowman," he declared coldly. "I would believe you, but — I do not understand. Between the pair of you, this tomb —" His voice trembled; he waited. "Something has been done here that I do not forget."

With impatient fingers, he plucked at the blue and white fibre, to rip the seals from the packet.

"We shall see," he muttered. "We shall see why."

David caught his hands in time, and held them.

"You shan't open that."

The young Sultan, amazed, incredulous, jerked backward suddenly with all the might in his body. He remained a prisoner, as though manacled. Thus, for a moment, the two men stood locked at arm's length in a dangerous silence, eying each other like boxers breaking from a clinch.

David let go, and stepped back a pace with a hostile bow.

"I beg your Highness's pardon," said he. "But you were forgetting."

The Sultan's little brown hand flew to the ruby hilt at his sash. The pupils of his eyes contracted. His whole frame quivered strongly.

Then, with visible effort, he drew his hand away from the kriss.

"For much less than that," he panted, "a man might *amok*."

David again bowed, without compromise.

"I am sorry," he answered dryly. "But you forgot. The packet 's not yours, nor mine either. It belongs to a lady."

The Sultan's red lips pouted in scorn.

"Oh!" he retorted lightly, "as for that —"

His fingers closed again on the Japanese twine.

"I don't know what may be the custom," said David quietly, "among Moslem princes; but plain white men would no more do what you're doing now, than they would open a grave."

The Sultan looked up, and stared. Silence filled the small green bower of light and shadow, — a silence brief yet profound, in which, while the men stood face to face, there was enacted the old struggle for comprehension between East and West.

"Really?" Rama's anger slowly changed to perplexity. "You feel so?" A new light played in his eyes, a twinkle of humorous tolerance, as when a subtle mind has met some fathomless yet amiable simplicity. "You really feel so about women? I have heard you make them a great deal too important."

He smiled pleasantly, raised the edge of his

black tunic, and stuck the packet, dagger-wise, under the knot of his *sarong*.

"I remember," he mused. "My English tutor thought like that. Now we — we have another saying: 'Woman rules her man till dawn, but may not jerk his bridle-rein all day.' You let your women fly about, and talk, at great expense."

Stooping, he gathered the white frangipani into an orderly cluster, which he placed at the head of the grave. After a silent and prolonged salaam, he wheeled about, restored to his former composure.

"Shall we go ashore now?" he inquired blandly.

"But my packet?" rejoined the stubborn David. "What happens?"

"Quite safe." Rama patted his sarong-knot calmly. "Let us wait. I must talk to your thief."

He crossed the clearing, and slipped his feet into the tiny sandals.

"Bowman," he added, turning, "I like you immensely. You're a fighting man, as I am, myself. We were not afraid of each other, just now." He motioned toward the lane. "Come. Let's not fuss about a trifle."

He waited until David's boots were on, then led the way back through the grove, treading silently over the moss with the same retarded, swaying gait, proud and deliberate as the motion

of a tiger. David, watching while he followed, was divided between strong liking and equally strong impatience. This cool young prince was not to be hurried; and meantime, somewhere on the broadside of Java, Mary Arnot was kept waiting.

They gained the dazzling shore of the island. The Sultan raised his arm. A stir passed through the varicolored group on the distant jetty, and at once the threefold bundle of canoes detached itself from the shade of land, to glide rapidly across the water, with many quick paddles glistening, and its golden thatch bright in the sun. Enchanted stillness covered lake and mountains, while the craft brushed in among the reeds. Rama and David embarked, silent as knights entering a magic shallop. Then back toward land they slid, to the drip of shining blades, over a pale, hot mirror deep as the inverted sky.

At the jetty, the young Moslem captain met them, lowering his primrose turban in a deep *sembah.* Some new and greater anxiety lined his face.

"Dato Hasan," said the Sultan, climbing forth upon the stones, and halting, erect and grave among his courtiers; "Dato Hasan, I have made you the Bantara of my person, and given you my sword to bear." He glanced at a long sword of ceremony, which the young man carried on his

right shoulder. "Bear it worthily. Suffer not the sword to rust, nor its eyes to be eaten out."

Dato Hasan listened humbly to this formula, and bowed low.

"Where is your prisoner?" continued Rama. "Set him before me."

The sword-bearer raised a woeful countenance.

"Turn aside your anger," he stammered. "The fellow had not the strength of devils, but the cunning. He overthrew his guards, Abdurrahman and Majang Koro. He fled." Hasan pointed up the marshy path that struggled inland. "Like a wild colt, into the mountains —"

"Enough!" The Sultan's fez flashed upward and backward. He seemed visibly taller. "Satan," he cried in fury, "Satan has been busy with my morning!"

Dato Hasan, nursing the long symbol of his office, drew back, humiliated, among the silken courtiers, who shifted uneasily and hung their heads in disgrace. Their master, shaking with passion, poured out a torrent of words from which they shrank without a murmur, without so much as an eyelid raised in defense.

At the very height and flaming climax of this outburst, David moved audaciously alongside, shoulder to shoulder, till his lips approached the royal ear.

He whispered.

A shock of astonishment ran throughout the whole retinue. The warlike nobles, as though a charm had snapped, raised their heads, stared in wonder, questioned each other askance. The Sultan himself, cut short in a savage epigram, had wheeled about with his blackest frown, and lips curling as if to bite. His features, after one droll conflict of opposite and bewildered emotions, relaxed gradually into a smile.

"Of course," he whispered, nodding to his bold adviser. "How stupid! He'll come back for it, of course. I never thought of that. Tonight; we'll catch him ourselves, Bowman. By the grave — "

His smile altered, in a crafty fashion that promised badly for Rosario. He stood musing. His followers, now that the storm had passed, took heart enough to change their attitudes, with murmurs, and the rustle of silks; their dark eyes meanwhile studying, in sullen curiosity, this unknown white Laksamana who could tame their lord.

"*Abis!*" cried the Sultan. "Go find your prisoner! *Lalu!* Scour the mountains! Bring him again!"

At one austere wave of his hand, the courtiers dispersed, pausing only to hide their gilt umbrellas in the bush.

"They'll never catch him, you know," laughed Rama. Mischievous as a boy, he watched them file away through the marshy path, to scatter like skirmishers among the distant trees. "Your plan, Bowman, promises better sport. Let them chase about. The sun's hot. Serves them right."

He beckoned imperiously to the young Dato Hasan, who stood waiting beside the bamboo tent.

"This finery," said he, "belies my description in the passport card. It might be awkward to explain. Come. Help me change."

Followed by the discomfited sword-bearer, he left the jetty, and disappeared into a neighboring clump of bamboo. David sat in the pavilion, and raged with helpless impatience. Time, unheeded in Oriental transactions, dragged by to the low sound of lake-water lapping among the deserted boats. Morning became noon. When at last the Sultan came forth again, he was in plain dress, without ornament or weapon, — black fez, severe white tunic, and a skirt painted in lozenges of burnt orange and dull brown. By this sober transformation, he appeared like some young Arab merchant, uncommonly proud and handsome. Dato Hasan came slowly after, directing three servants who carried baskets.

"Bowman, this is a pleasant place," drawled the prince, stooping to enter the small pavilion.

"Let us eat beside the lake, where it's cool. Here comes tiffin. Plain fare, you know. I'm not a Christian, so I don't drink."

Tiffin they had, accordingly, in their shelter of clean thatch, an airy chamber walled with spacious and glowing landscapes — the lake asleep under a fierce white noon, volcanoes notching the lofty horizon with dark green pinnacles — a world of stillness, poignant color, and great distances, set in panels of bamboo framework, but pictured in limitless sunlight and the incomparable purity of mountain air. Barefoot hill-men, reverently mute, glided into and from the pavilion, kneeling to serve the dishes, — pastoral dishes of rice, bamboo pith, and savory beans; of wood-birds and young water-fowl stewed in cocoanut milk; of tiny red fishes heaped in curry; of pine-apples from the hot lowlands, and artful jellies disguised as fruit, with fresh rind seemingly intact. Ashore, from time to time, Dato Hasan's yellow turban shone like a great blossom among the roadside trees, as he craned out to guard the approaches.

"And now," yawned the Sultan at last, "now, Bowman, it is the hour to sleep." Throughout tiffin, he had discoursed lazily of horses, their speed, their ancestry, their exploits in Poona, Buitenzorg, Mosul, or Shanghai; but more and more his voice had drooped, his eyes grown heavy.

"To sleep, eh? It is very pleasant. You, too, will be wishing to sleep."

David's temper, long smouldering, broke out in flame.

"I want to be off," he retorted angrily. "Just that, and no more. Hand over what belongs to me, and let me go."

"Dear fellow," replied his host, with a smile, friendly but obstinate; "dear fellow, there 's no such hurry. Too hot, besides."

The speaker curled himself into the shadiest corner of the pavilion, stretched his limbs luxuriously as a cat, subsided on the matting, and with cheek upon arm, dropped at once into the sweet oblivion of Eastern slumber.

David sat and listened to his breathing, the only sound among the mountains. The longer he listened, the more he grew enraged. It quickly became unbearable.

"Rama!" he cried.

The sleeper made no stir.

"Rama!" David brought down his heel so heavily that the pavilion shook. "Where 's my packet?"

The royal sluggard allowed one eye to open, and blissfully to close.

"I don't remember." The words died in a broken whisper, a blur of meaningless and measureless content. "Wait till — catch that fellow — you go to sleep, too."

It was useless. A caravan of packets would not summon this Malay from his afternoon stupor. David might glower as he pleased; he saw himself at a deadlock, simple yet effective, not to be broken either by force or by entreaty. He could only wrap himself in patience, wait, stick closer to Rama than a brother, seize a more fortunate mood, watch the chance. He chose another corner of the floor, and stretching out, resigned himself to smoke. Even the black Paiacombo tobacco brought no comfort; it might not cloud that vista, all too clear and dismal, into which his busy plans unfolded.

"Suppose I do get it back?" he pondered. "Suppose I do overtake her? It 's all for the other man. Gerald: that was his name. Something she 'll cry over, and keep the rest of her life. And my part — that 's all. 'Thank you so much; good-by!' "

He flung away his cigarette. It fell into the lake with a slight hiss. Rama's quiet breathing succeeded, tranquil accompaniment to vexing thought.

Thanks, and good-by; that indeed was the end of the vista. All for the other man — the handsome stranger in the hut — Villameres's Englishman. For another man, now dead. Thanks, and good-by. On the heels of this, why should there steal in (welcome and unwel-

come, like a bit of solace he had not asked for) the memory of her eyes in the hill-garden and by the roadside? They were not dark, after all, but blue — a deep and changing blue.

When he woke, the lake was of that color, and the evening air, and all the mountains but a few far peaks tipped with amber sunset.

"*Silam.*" The Sultan's voice rose, meditative, through the dusk. "*Silam.* It is twilight."

Propped on elbow, Rama lay staring mournfully over the bamboo rail, far out across the evening water. His face, his pose, in that uncertain light, were full of unutterable weariness and sadness. He seemed a mystical ancient figure of Melancholy, questioning the world in vain.

"Alone." He was murmuring to himself. "The soul of man is alone — like a bird flying on the face of dark waters."

He turned slowly, to find David watching. His face brightened somewhat.

"Awake, Bowman?" He roused, but languidly. "Sleep is a great mystery. It always leaves me sad, you know. 'In sleep I feel myself to be a mortal,' — so said Sikander of the Two Horns. What is it you call him? Alexander the Great? — Ah, that must have been a man! *His* life had a purpose."

The lapping water played an interlude round their pavilion.

"What were we going to do?" The Sultan puckered his brows. "I forget."

"Catch my thief on the island," David replied. "The thief who lifted your Written Stone."

Rama gathered himself upright, and stretched his arms.

"True," he yawned. "That is better than nothing. Not much. But let us go."

At the door he paused, and gave some order to a squatting guard, who rose and flitted ghost-like from the jetty.

"That leaves us free," he explained. "I sent my men home. Have we matches?"

The two companions chose a light canoe, and paddled slowly out into the lake, munching biscuits for their supper. Overhead, where the sunset faintly tinged the upper air, the flying-foxes wavered in erratic flight; the vesper chanting of the Koran made its mournful circuit among the villages; a few ruddy points of lamplight, skirting the shore, blinked slowly behind trees, or quickly behind the moving legs of unseen bearers; dogs barked, and voices of men traveling some mountain trail half a day's journey upward, came floating down in fragments almost articulate. Presently, dead ahead, the island of the old Sultan Muda reared from dusky indigo its crag of darkness.

With David's help, the truant prince hid their

canoe deep among bushes. Then through the mossy lane both men stole into a deeper blackness, the heart of the island.

"Here 's fun." Rama crouched under the corded banyan fringe. His pessimism had vanished at prospect of a night's entertainment. "Wait," he whispered grimly, "till I catch that confounded lip-lap!"

They waited. Sounds of evening diminished into hush of night. The banyan covert, deep as a mine-shaft, held at the top a shimmering pallor studded with tropic stars; at bottom, only a dense perfume of frangipani, and a white blur where the flowers themselves, at the grave-head across the circle, caught the dregs of starlight. Lake, populous valley, woods to the least tree-point, mountains to the farthest crater, slumbered in a universal calm. Not a paddle could strike the water, without being heard inside this leafy mausoleum.

No one came. The air grew colder. Time passed. A few light ripples disturbed the shore, and lightly ended. Then stillness closed in, heavier than before.

Suddenly the Sultan leaned over athwart the gloom.

"Some one," he breathed in David's ear. "By the tree. Quiet. I felt him."

David listened, leaning forward, and straining

his eyes. No boat had crossed the lake, near or far. There could not be a third presence on the island.

Yet, as he watched without belief, a moving shadow blotted the whiteness of the frangipani. Something had crept between him and the grave.

"Now!" whispered the Sultan; then aloud: "Come on!"

Together they sprang up and out, like men tackling at football. Without a sound, the shadow-bulk rushed past them and was gone. A flying sprinkle of drops fell warm on David's outstretched hand. Through the branches went a noise like the passage of a sudden gust.

"*Hantu!*" Rama gave a stifled cry, and clutched David's arm in all the panic of one who acknowledges the powers of darkness. "A light! A light!"

David, tugging out his box, struck a match. It flared, blinding them at first, then revealing the dark ring of banyan walls, empty. There was nothing — nothing but thin vertical shadows writhing like knotted worms, where in one place the dangling roots, green-painted with moss, were swaying as a reed curtain sways when violently parted.

The match burned out. David struck another, to find the Sultan stooping anxiously over the

grave, and beckoning. His olive-gray cheek shone wet, as though brushed with an aspergill.

"Bring your match. I thought I saw —"

Together, by the streaming splinter of light, they bent toward the brown disk of the Written Stone.

"Whatever it was," declared Rama solemnly, "it had been swimming!"

The drops on his cheek, the drops that glistened on the back of David's hand, were plain water. Stamped in water, on the brown surface of the stone, was the print of a naked foot, the great toe twisted at right angles like an outspread thumb.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DESSA

"THAT 's no man's foot." The Sultan stood for a moment, very pale, his round eyes bright and scared. The curved penciling of his lips, nostrils, and brows made him look as plaintive and appealing as a girl. "What is it? No ape ever grew so big as that."

He shivered. The match went out, and dropped a red glowworm fibre into the moss.

"I felt it pass," he whispered, moving closer. "A shadow, Bowman. A wet shadow. Men tell of *hantu*, like the river-ghost of Badang."

His groping hand met David's, and caught hold instantly.

"Agh! Your fingers are wet, too. Let us go back. This grave is not a good place, at night."

"That," said David, unwilling to give ground, "was no more a ghost than you are."

"What was it, then?" whispered the other scornfully. "What else?"

The question had no answer. Angry and helpless, David shook his head in the dark.

"I don't know," he answered lamely. "It's a thing that — Oh, the story 's too long!"

The Sultan jerked him by the wrist.

"Come. I go back — ashore. I will face any man alive, but — Come! We are not Badang, to fight with wet shadows!"

David held off, listening. The island had become a solid block of silence. He was not afraid of hunting shadows, wet or dry; but to thresh them out from this matted thicket of leaves and banyan cordage, by the light of a dozen matches, would prove an idiot's employment.

"Let 's wait. See if it comes back."

Rama, at this notion, gave a little gasp.

"Not for anything," he answered fervently. "I 've had enough. Come!"

David, yielding, allowed himself to be towed rapidly through the blind corridor, and out upon the open shore of the island. Rama neither ceased pulling, nor unclasped his hand, till they had stumbled over the gunwale of their canoe in the shrubbery; and once afloat, he plied his paddle with a racing stroke, fast and vicious. The dugout surged across velvet blackness, the waves of her speed shivering the reflected stars, until her prow bumped the jetty.

Out sprang the Sultan, and clapped his hands. Presently, from the bushes on the right, there dodged a flaming pair of torches, that streamed

low in the draught of their own motion. Two bronze men carried them, running with a glint of muscles in the hurried light, as though twin statues had sprung to life, and revived Athenian games down a tossing aisle of bamboo shadows. They approached, halted, and bowed low, revealing the serious brown faces of Amat and Ali.

The Sultan drew his first long breath of relief.

"Now then," he commanded cheerfully, "home to bed!"

They followed the torches, winding upward and steeply upward under whispering trees, in a smooth beaten path; through plaited bamboo gates, at last, that shone like woven gold; then among the woodland huts and flowering fruit-trees of a small *dessa*, — a village all asleep and motionless, like a stage background.

"There's your house, Bowman," declared the Sultan wearily. He pointed to a neat hutch of basket-work, fresh and yellow among its tawny neighbors. "I had it built for you this afternoon. Good-night." He turned off, but paused. "Oh, and I say, — my Chinese tailor's going to make you fresh clothes overnight. Give Amat yours for the pattern. Sleep well!"

The parting advice was easier to give than to follow. David, stretched on a clean new cot in his tiny chamber, lay wakeful for a long time, staring through the open door at a band of

starlight fringed with the darkness of treetops. That wet imprint on the old Sultan's grave, the same distorted foot which twice before had daunted him, now reared in the memory its threatening symbol, acute and vivid, like a spot painfully dancing before sun-blinded eyes. So this danced and wavered through long night thoughts, fretting and obscuring the mind. David saw but one fact. The skipping half-breed Rosario, though himself harmless as a parrot, took on a sudden grim dignity; he no longer figured alone, but as precursor to something without shape which came and went in darkness, a midnight shadow, dripping like a water-wraith. Still, where lay the cause? At what command, by what rites, could so grinning and fatuous an agent summon the likeness of such a footprint?

"Mary's well out of this," thought the young man, tossing on his cot. "Can't even *call* her Mary, can I? Not ever. Anyway, glad she's not here."

Sleep, at last, followed this conclusion. And when David woke, the fresh morning sun flickered through many a shifting crevice in bamboo leaves, to disperse all vexing questions with its showered light, its cool, bright bath of healing. Over the lashed platform of his new house, quivered herring-bone shadows from a *nipah* palm. Girls, robed in buttercup yellow and

fairy pink, trailed a slow procession under the fruit-blossoms, like eastern Hours passing in a pageant. The *dessa*, though quiet, had been long awake; for all these meek brown girls, slender and straight under head-burdens, and swaying with the gait of goddesses, already were filing home from some distant bazaar. They vanished, murmuring. Naked children scampered in the clean little street, their bellies tight-ballooned with fatness. Nearer to hand, in the shade of a rice-barn shaped like a cradle, two withered old men squatted on a purple carpet of fallen *jambu* petals, and held serene discourse.

"A real chief," said one proudly. "See how he walks, there! A true prop of the old banyan, this prince!"

"True," assented the other, squirting from stained lips a blood-red stream of betel. "Great are his comeliness and valor. See how all the women leave their *batik* frames, to watch. So they sing in the *pantun*: —

> 'Hang Casturi passes the door, —
> The young wife runs from her husband's arms!'"

The first elder thoughtfully nodded.

"Great is youth," he replied, with smiling regret. "But this prince — he cares not for the women. His breed is the fighting breed. That young Dato Hasan is a mere dandy, who spends

more hours in dressing than a girl; sitting on horseback, he will straighten his turban by his shadow on the ground. I have *seen* him. But our prince here, no: he is a fighter, and brave. Brave as Omar's gamecock, or the fighting crickets from Sangean. The son of brightness and wonder. See him, there!"

The object of their praises came into view. It was the Sultan Rama, in dull blue robe and scarlet sandals, returning from the bath. He stalked slow and haughty as a young Tamburlaine. A girl in pale yellow minced before him, carrying a silver soap-case; another in pale green minced behind, with a towel — self-conscious and demure, both of them, as though bearing publicly the instruments of an emperor's baptism. From every door among the gold-brown huts peeped a woman's face, admiring. Rama had glances for no one, left or right, but moved in all the dignity of boredom.

"Good-morning. What pleases you so?" He paused suddenly before David's veranda; and brushing the two girls away like flies, stood looking in at the door. He had caught David, perched on the edge of his couch, grinning. "What is your joke?"

David pulled a more sober face.

"I was listening," he replied ingenuously, "to those old men. They praised your valor."

Rama, in his blue robe, gave a comical start, a jerk of discomfiture. A black frown clouded his face, then cleared in a smile, part austere, part sheepish.

"Last night, you mean? You think I went *futt?*" He turned away, signaling with delicate fingers a truce to argument. "Very well. Night is one world, day another. My courage — we 'll talk of that after breakfast."

He paced majestically from sight, round the rice-barn cradle. Along the street, the faces of the women disappeared indoors, or bent studiously over loom and *sarong* frame, dyeing-pot and shuttle.

David, meanwhile, donned the white clothes made as by magic in the night. A new rubber helmet, of London make, lay ready for his morning walk. Breakfast he ate, *coram populo*, in the veranda of his new house, — a sylvan breakfast, brought by unknown, silent men, who served him as deftly, with as much reverence, as though he had owned them for a lifetime. From the tree-tops, while he banqueted, a bell-bird scattered everywhere a tinkling melody that seemed the voice of mountain sunshine, the singing of the leaves, the green light of the *dessa* itself, translated into music.

A sultan's guest in a paradise, he might not enjoy these things. He waited, smoking, more

gloomy than a bankrupt. He had failed in his mission; he lingered here alone, as far from its purpose as when, on that morning in the banca, he had first opened the silver locket; he sat a prisoner to hospitality, bound by the whims of this arbitrary friend, this petted monarch, who was in no hurry. Worst of all, thought David, even while he fumed, he liked the man.

Thus dejected, he was listening without comfort to the song of the bell-bird, when up beside his veranda bobbed a neat little piebald turban, and a keen little swarthy face, with twinkling eyes inquisitive and friendly, like a mongoose peering over a threshold.

"Sidin!" cried the young man, with a start of surprise that was almost hope. "Sidin!"

It was no other. The small chamberlain from the mountain top, smiling, competent, very much alive and awake, bade him good-morning. The man still wore at his waist the kriss of Her faithless coachman. He carried himself like one who enjoys importance.

"What's happened, Sidin? Are you here alone?"

"Alone, Tuan." Sidin fumbled in the folds of his red sash. "I bring the lady's message, paper-writing."

He pulled out a folded sheet of thin Dutch paper. David read his own name, written in a

hand which he had never seen before, and was never to forget. The other words, inside, were set to music for all time, accompanied, twined beyond extrication, with that song pouring from the high trees.

DEAR MR. BOWMAN, — You will understand why I was so selfish, yesterday morning, as to send you into danger. I did not think. Every scrap from Gerald is precious to me, and I wanted that one. I have been dreading, and hoping, to hear once more from him. — Please forgive me.

Mrs. Hemmes and her husband appeared here — contrary to our plans — and have persuaded me to turn back for a week or two at their cinchona plantation, Batu Blah. It is beyond the upper fork of the Arvana road, on the right-hand branch. They both join me in hoping that you will be able to come up and see us. We arrive there this evening.

Sincerely yours,

MARY ARNOT.

Your boy Sidin is invaluable. He brought me here to the station quite safely, went back to discover your whereabouts, and reports that you are in excellent hands.

Sidin appeared to be smiling, but inoffensively, downward at his own toes.

"Where is she? What did she tell you?"

The messenger looked up in all due gravity.

"I do not know, Tuan. She comes." Pointing with his chin, he broadly indicated the village gates, the village walls of woven gold, the serried bamboo and plantain greenery, and the lowlands hidden beyond them. "She will come this evening, my lord."

More questions brought forth no more details. The lady would be among the hills by nightfall. Sidin could project his mind no further; he had played his meagre part, spoken his few lines; and yet when, clinking a handful of silver florins, he made exit by the *dessa* gates and went singing up the mountain, he left behind him a whole scene transformed. The green twilight was at once brighter and cooler. The women flitting in gay *kabaias* from door to door, like birds of party-colored feather; the undertone of gossip from shady rooms and flowering alleys; the laughter of children; the click-clack of looms; the grinding thump of a rice-pestle; the sour pungency from betel-nuts sweating in a hidden storehouse, — all these became parts of something different and happier than before. David saw, and heard, and smelled, and behold it was good. He forgot his worries of last night. Mary was coming back. Whatever had unsweetened the world, it was gone. The very cheroot he smoked had suddenly got a flavor above tobacco grown on planetary soil.

"Where does old Rama buy these?" He watched the smoke in lazy delight. "They're wonderful."

Into this propitious mood broke the voice of the Sultan himself.

"What do you say to a swim?" In his plain Arab dress of yesterday, Sri Rama stood before him unattended. "Better than lounging among women?"

"Swim!" David upset his rattan stool, and vaulted down from his veranda like a schoolboy invited to play truant. "Bully! Where?"

The young monarch smiled, in rather sad approval.

"How full of energy you chaps are!" he mused; then, glancing disconsolately round the *dessa*, — "Women, these women, always the same everywhere! It's like stuffing sugared almonds all day! You're better company than that she-tailor, Hasan. Here, Amat! Follow us!"

Through a sliding lattice wicket, the back gate of the village, they stepped at once into towering jungle, an abrupt chute of landscape, a cataract of sunlight and billowing green. Stag-horn ferns, banks of white paschal lilies, surged waist-high about them; and from many a branch, in many a hue, great orchids dangled until the skyward vista seemed like an immense hothouse tilted upon end.

"To the Chinaman's, Amat. Guide us."

A little path, half-hidden, ascended in loops and smothered whirls. Up these the hill-man went skipping like a goat. David and the Sultan followed at leisure. From terrace to terrace in this Babylonian garden, they halted to sniff the scented morning, or drink deep of the clear, mild air, or, chatting lazily, to watch the metallic blue-and-orange streak where a *béo* darted through the sunlight, or the fluttering course of a green magpie with coral beak and legs. The mountain-side was very still.

The *dessa*, far below, had vanished in a mound of verdure, when all at once the Sultan paused, more quickly than before, and listened more intently.

"You hear that, Bowman?"

David shook his head.

"Nothing but Amat, up aloft there."

"No," rejoined Rama quietly. "Alongside. Off in the bush. — Stopped now."

Again and again, as they climbed, he slanted his black fez to the right, sidewise, cocking an ear. Once David thought that he, too, heard a swishing of leaves in that direction, parallel to their course. And presently, when they had overtaken Amat squatting morosely under a laurel, they faced each other with a quick nod of agreement.

"Something." Rama's curved lips pouted. He listened in a brown study, though all the leaves again were still. "Honest people would climb by this path, — not break their necks. That beast of a Regent may have sent somebody. If it's a spy from his *Kraton*, we'll —"

He beckoned to Amat, who sprang on foot.

"Go see, thou." He pointed into the laurel.

The guide was gone a noticeable time. The soft crashing of ferns and branches rose, accelerated, then seemed to split in twain. Half the sound fled off, abated; half quietly returned. Amat's face, as he slipped through the laurels into the path, wore a look surlier than ever, yet altered and puzzled.

"It ran, lord," he reported, with gruff submission. "I could not catch. It might be larger than a tiger's head, what I saw. I could not tell, for the bushes. The thing was red — red as *tupai tanah*."

"Lead up, then," commanded Rama curtly. "To the pool."

They started on, without further parley. But after a few steps, the Sultan fell back beside David.

"Do *you* understand that?" he grumbled. "*Tupai tanah*. It *was* following, too. Something red as a ground-squirrel? — No more do I."

He clambered away once more, nimble and silent, but shaking his head like a man ill pleased.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREEN POOL

A MINGLED music, like that of harps and little bells, came dropping through the boughs. Clear, sweet, in perfect time, the tinkling measures flowed on without beginning or end, doubling and returning upon themselves as eddies wander in a brook.

The three men, climbing a short flight of earthen stairs, gained level ground among rasamala pillars and banyans buttressed with huge roots. The grove reared from a wide terrace, carpeted with grass and purple violets. Deep in shade, a low building of whitewashed stone ran out bare flanking walls to inclose part of the wood in a hollow square, like a compound.

By the vaulted door, an old Chinaman sat fanning his stomach with a palm-leaf, smoking a conical cigarette, and listening sagely to the widespread chime of hidden music.

"*Mandi, baba,*" growled Amat, wasting no ceremony.

The slant-eyed proprietor of the bath rose, grinned, and waved his fan to usher them down a

flagstone passage, slit into many narrow doors along each wall, and roofed only with sunshine and drooping leaves.

"Here you are," announced the Sultan, pointing to one gap in these catacombs, and entering its neighbor. "Amat will watch our clothes. First man in!"

David came out, naked, with a whoop. The Chinaman beckoned him, flourishing a towel, from a cross corridor. Through this he ran, to emerge, delighted, on the cement platform of the swimming-pool.

Walled with white masonry, green hanging vines, and flame-colored masses of hibiscus, a deep little tarn of emerald lay still under arching trees. Cool shadows, golden wriggles of sunlight, swam and played in it, making mysterious designs on a bottom of gray cobblestones worn smooth in some mountain torrent. From close by, among leaves, the same unending music poured quietly into this retreat, and filled the air with a mellow concord as of harp-strings and temple-bells.

"First man, Rama!"

David took his header, in a curve like a leaping salmon. Bathed in cool green light, he glided along bottom; then rose to float deliciously in the flickering sunshine; then romped at full speed, face under, through a glorious riot of spray.

Banyan ropes, festooned from tree to tree

across the pool, served as rustic swings and life-lines. On one of these he hoisted himself, to sit balancing, and churn the water with his legs. Swimming in this bower, to the music of metallophones and bamboo chimes, was a different sport from swimming in the Sulu Sea, where he had last practiced it, alone with the moon.

"Pretty stroke, Bowman, that of yours."

Rama poised on the edge of the pool, a live statue of Mercury cast in new bronze. He laughed, clove air and water in a single arrowy flash, and rigid as a blade from finger to toe, shot through the green translucency without a stroke.

"Worth coming for, is n't it?" he puffed, swarming up beside David, like a gymnast on a trapeze. "So glad you care about this sort of thing." He shook the water from his eyes, and laughed again. "You can't guess, old chap, what it means to have good company — the kind that will enjoy things — like you."

He plashed with his feet, smiling radiantly.

"Why," David ventured, "won't Dato Hasan?"

"He! swim!" The naked Sultan, in making a gesture of disdain, fell backward off the rope.

"Hasan's an ass!" he sputtered, climbing up again and perching. "Of course he's my sword-bearer, and all that, but — Honestly, Bowman, you have no idea what a dull life those chaps lead

me, at home. Dull. Nothing ever happens. Nothing!"

The banyan cable swayed with his vehemence. From the surrounding leaves, the tranquil forest-music chimed its interlude.

"I was made for war," he continued sadly. "And there are no more wars."

He pondered awhile, spreading and contracting his toes luxuriously in the clear water.

"If there were any" — He glanced sidelong at his companion — "if there were, Bowman, you might not find so much fault with — with my courage."

"I said nothing," David protested, "I meant nothing of that sort."

The Sultan shook his head.

"I know what you think," he retorted sorrowfully. "White men believe nothing. I know many beautiful stories, many terrible stories, all true, and all very strange. If I told you one, — the best one, — you would laugh at me inside yourself. I know." He looked up with a mournful smile. "Yet I am not a liar. Neither was my father, who told me; nor his father, who told him. They were all princes. They would not lie, in private matters. They were all princes, and what you call gentlemen. Last night, by the great Sultan Muda's grave, when the wet shadow slid by in the dark, you had no fear, because you

had no knowledge or belief. Does that make me a coward?" Rama's eye glowed suddenly, his voice rang out with a kind of hopeless indignation. "Am I? Because the night is filled with things you never heard of? — things that princes have known from the old times, but any broker would laugh at in Singapore, where nothing is true except dollars and drink, whiskey and the rate of exchange? — *Their* beliefs! *Chiss!*"

He hung his head, and peered into the green depths.

"I do not laugh," said David.

Rama nodded.

"No. And you showed respect, out there by the grave." The Sultan's manner grew more composed. "Still, you think I was afraid, of something quite— Never mind. These matters are hard to explain."

The two naked truants, swinging side by side, kicked up a thunder of foam, then watched it subside into bubbles.

"Much too hard," David assented thoughtfully. "You know, Rama, I don't mind telling — Well, sometimes, the less said about courage the better."

"Ah!" his companion murmured, with a quiet air of satisfaction. "So you will own up, too. I was waiting. Now, this ape-foot *hantu* thing? What is *your* idea of that?"

David, busily collecting the strands of his narrative, watched the last bubble float and dissolve.

"It begins with a silver locket," he answered slowly. "No, first I fell overboard." Thus, fairly started, he recounted his whole adventure. The forest orchestra played its low, tinkling accompaniment, as to a story told on the stage. "Now you know as well — as well as I, almost."

Almost; David was hugging to himself the secret of that reservation, when Rama gave a short, musical laugh, and another of his glances, sidelong, up and away, quicker than the visit of a humming-bird.

"You saw her only once?" he chuckled. "And even before you *had* seen her — oho!"

"Well?" David's tone was passably cool. "Where 's the joke?"

The Sultan's features became a study in courteous gravity.

"Your body is whiter than cotton," he observed, in sly approval. "Why is your face the color of that hibiscus on the wall?"

David swung glowering, unable to retort.

"No; I can't understand," the Sultan reflected, smiling mischief. "Here you have undergone many troubles, and long journeys — as faithful as Hang Tuah to his rajah. And this ape-foot thing comes after, always, in the dark. You had only seen the woman's picture; never heard her

voice, which might have been sharper than a kite's whistle. And yet you have said to yourself, secretly, 'All this I will do, and more; for the woman is mine!' "

"Not at all!" cried David, with a start both of anger and guilt. "Her man is dead. I *told* you, Rama."

His tormentor laughed quietly, without mirth.

"Yes, *that* man is dead. You're alive." Rama stared wistfully into the pool. "It is thus always, brother. A man dies. His horse will whinny for days, and paw in the stall through night after night, and refuse grain, listening for his step. His step, that no longer bends the grass. But with women! Next day his woman will sit laughing, and eating sweetmeats, and buying new silks of some box-wallah from the land of Kling. A good friend of mine died, and his — Ah! I have seen that, also; and it has made me sad."

"It 's not so, Rama, with this girl."

"No?" The royal misogynist waved his legs, despondent as before. "How can you tell?"

"One has only to see her."

"It may be," agreed the Sultan gloomily. "There *must* be another kind, or else the old tales and poems lie. I have never seen such a woman." Suddenly he glanced up. "But this one, Bowman: suppose she could forget her dead man, and remember only you? How then?"

"If I thought she was that kind," said David hastily, "I should n't be here."

Metallophones and bamboo bells played their interlude again, while the young Sultan, his curved brows drawn together, considered this puzzling answer.

"My thought flies one way, yours another." He stretched out his bare arm parallel with David's. "Look. It's the different color of our skins. I can't understand you." Dropping his arm, he dropped the problem also. "Never mind. You shall have your dead man's packet, Bowman. I'll give it to you when we dress. Come! Another dive!"

He hoisted both feet out of water, set them precariously on the banyan cable, stood upright wavering with arms outspread like a dancer on a slack wire, ran a few steps, then clinging wildly with both fingers and toes, fell underneath the rope in a swing that shot David off upon the water as flat and sprawling as a starfish.

"Come on!" laughed the Sultan. "A dive from the trees!"

He shinned up the swaying cable, with David in close pursuit, hand over hand. Ten feet above the pool, a great bough forked and spread horizontal between layers of sunny leafage. Seesawing on this, the two men could look down through chinks upon the whole inclosure of the

bath: the red-tiled roof of the Chinaman's quarters; the cross pattern of open corridors, like hedge-tops in a maze; the sharp edge of volcano spur slicing up through the forest on the one hand, slicing down on the other; and over the opposite wall of the swimming-pool, a bamboo platform built among trees outside, where squatted an orchestra of little boys, — their music now stopped, and all of them, with friendly nods and grins, hailing the pair of naked gentlemen perched on the bough.

"Here goes!" cried the Sultan gayly.

Joining his palms in the devotional attitude of diving, he was about to bend forward. The movement switched a frond of leaves across his face. Rama brushed them away, but almost in the same contortion snatched at them again, tottered, caught hold, and saved himself from falling.

"See, Bowman! Look!" He jerked his chin rapidly, like a snake striking, toward the roofless corridors of the dressing compartments. "A man — running — on the wall! Look! He climbed over, from outside!"

The long, pliant bough sprang with his arrested motion, and swayed under them; plunging foliage crossed and recrossed before their eyes. As through a thicket in a gale, David caught only a glimpse or two, in flying patches of vision; but

he seemed to see or guess the passage of somebody, something, that bounded along the edge of the corridors, and dropped from sight among them.

"Rama! Clothes, our clothes! Is the packet — ?"

The Sultan nodded, as he gathered himself again for the downward swoop.

"Yes. Inside there. Quickly, Bowman!"

David shot from the bough in a breakneck dive. Even as he fell, he saw Rama hurtling through the air beside him. They bobbed up in the same boiling circle of foam, kicked each other in their battle for headway, and raced through the pool like a frantic pair of water-spaniels.

Above the hiss and welter of swimming, they heard a brief outcry, — the voice of Amat, ringing through the pent space of the corridors.

White hand and brown touched the goal together. Body to body, the swimmers heaved over the edge of the main platform, slipped and rolled on the warm cement, sprang afoot, and ran stumbling into the passage-way.

"Ah!" cried the Sultan sharply, with the gesture of a man in pain.

His exclamation resounded through that confinement like a note of singing, bandied from wall to blazing wall. Both men stood dripping, before the little cells which held their clothing. David's

door, Rama's door, alike remained safely closed. But in front of them, on the flagstones, scowling up into the hot sunlight which he would never behold again, lay the surly, faithful guardian, Amat. A thread of crimson showed below his right nostril.

"It followed us," said his master, in a dull, dogmatic voice. "Up the hill. It did follow us, you see."

The body at their feet relaxed, with a final movement which bore sinister resemblance to life.

"On the head," was David's only answer. He pointed to a loose flag that lay across the corridor, like a plate spun in a children's game. "It was done with that."

He looked at the Sultan, the Sultan at him, stolidly, without moving. Into the silence and glaring heat of the passage-way, stole the happy tinkle of "*Onang-Onang*," played faintly among the trees. Amat lay supine, his sulky face turned awry, as if the tune disturbed him in his sleep.

CHAPTER XV

THE HIGHWAY

THE Sultan dashed one hand across his eyes, and seemed to brush his wits from stupor into action. Without a word, he ran quickly to the nearest wall; without a word, but in full comprehension, David gave him knee and hand. Up went the prince like a greyhound; then standing on the mossy tiles that crowned the wall, he scanned the forest, up hill and down, long and eagerly.

"Not a sign, Bowman." With clenched fists, and forearms lightly channeled by tense muscles, Rama made a queer spasmodic gesture, rather of postponement and resolve than of defeat. "Very well." He turned and jumped down inside the corridor. "Let us dress, then."

He spoke no further, but strode back into his cell like a man keyed high to some purpose. The matter was far from ended; though not till after they had thrown on their clothes, roused the Chinaman from his noonday sleep in the vaulted entry, and with his terrified assistance had brought their burden out of doors, — not till

then, and then briefly, did the Sultan unfold his mind.

"See, my friend — " He looked down, between pity and wrath, at the figure stowed so helplessly on a wide counterpane of violets, shaded by rattans. "This coolie was my servant. Mine, and faithful. Whoever it was that did this —"

Rama stopped, but his eyes burned like brown coals. He fumbled at the collar of his tunic, undid a button, and pulled out, in a little pouring loop of bright links, the slack of a gold chain. It dangled on his breast; while rummaging again he felt for something under his waist-knot.

"This," he pointed a trembling figure at Amat's body, "comes from this." It was the small oblong packet, twine and seals intact, which he now held in his other hand. "I promised you, Bowman, to give it back. But light promises break before heavy ones." Rama tossed his head, and swept the jungle with his eyes, challenging. In pose, in feature, and in words, he underwent a singular transformation; as though by stepping across an unseen line he had left the present, receded a hundred years, and taken on the look and habit of a warlike past. "And now I promise that this thing shall hang here about my neck, till I have found those who killed my servant."

Again his slim brown fingers worked busily. Snapping a hidden spring in the gold links, he parted them asunder, wound the chain cunningly in and out, round and round, under the Japanese fibre, until with another snap of the clasp the packet fell knotted securely on his breast.

"Come and take it!" he cried, strutting forth, in game-cock bravado, to where the sun blazed over a little clearing. He struck the suspended token with his palm, calling aloud. "Night or day, it is here for you! Come and take it!"

The unmoving landslide of the woods, fern, frond, and orchid, gave back only heat and silence. So, thought David, he himself once shouted over against the concealing trees, and got no answer. Even the music was still. The Chinaman gave a nervous cackle, not understanding this parade.

"Bearers will come up for *him*," said Rama, returning quietly, and nodding toward the sleeper in his bed of violets. "You, Bowman, will go down with me? We have only begun."

They scrambled down the path, through leaves and flowers, toward the *dessa*, listening warily for noises in the bush. None came, save when now and then a bird darted off, with a quick flirt of sound from leaf and feather, like cards shuffled in a pack.

As he slid open the rear gate of the village,

Rama paused, and smiled. He tapped the packet in its golden sling.

"My courage," said he, "will not be wanting."

Close-wrapped in silence again, he led the way past David's hut, past the rice-crib, round several turns and windings in green bamboo shade. Apart, and overhung more deeply than the other houses, snuggled the Sultan's brown *attap* quarters, marked by no sign of royalty except that a guardsman, dozing under the hedge, spat his betel into a little hand-jar of gold, massive and beautifully carven.

The front room of this *kraton*, this palace in disguise, was crowded, Malay fashion, with various untidy heaps — the gilt umbrellas, a roll of prayer-rugs, pony-saddles, malacca riding-crops with jeweled knobs — dropped here and there as if a puppy had fetched them from outdoors. But the inner chamber, to which Rama straightway brought his guest, proved no less orderly than splendid, — a cool, dark little retreat, hung in peaceful colors, with gold ornaments glimmering beside luxurious divans.

"You are welcome here," said Rama simply; and delaying for no more elaborate courtesy, crossed to the farther wall, on which bristled an armory of bright weapons. Krisses in every pattern hung there, — krisses in scabbards of gold, of red lacquer and brass, of tenderly veined

wood, — *sepang*, *cherita*, *paso-pati*, no shape or variant wanting.

The Sultan turned from studying them.

"While I keep this —" he raised and let fall the packet on his breast, — "what shall you do?"

"No choice," David answered. "I stand by, of course."

His host, nodding, handled the weapons rapidly but carefully.

"Wear this, to please me." He pulled from the sheath, and proffered, a long bone-handled kriss of the *naga-sasra* design, bronze-green, and crinkled as gently as a tongue of flame. "Try if it is lucky. Span it so, from *ganja* to *puchuk*."

David, obeying, set his palm on the flat of the blade, and measured it by handbreadths.

"'*Sri, Lungu, Dunia,*'" murmured the Sultan, keeping tally like a girl with daisy petals; "'*Rara, Pati, Sri.*' — Good! Your sword will bring you fortune. Now for mine —"

He took down a second kriss, equally plain. Its wooden haft, brown as mahogany, shone polished with ancient use. He gripped it, drew, and felt the balance proudly.

"This," he explained, dwelling with affection on the words, "this is one of the twelve holy krisses forged by a priest in Mataram for the Sultan of Lombock."

Rama laid his own little hand on the blade, and measured carefully its cruel grace; then gave a quick start, and looked up in dismay.

"Death," he whispered.

Another measurement, by the same formula, left him staring.

"It is death, Bowman. *Pati*, says the steel. It comes out death, and a coffin."

By his first impulse, Rama flung down the kriss upon a divan; by his second, he recovered it and stood as though gazing into the future.

"You will smile again at my courage," he declared. "So let it stay. At least we can clean the rust off."

On the table stood a bowl heaped with fruit. The Sultan took a pineapple, stabbed it through and through, then with a red silk scarf wiped the juice from the blade.

"Let it be so. Death." Sheathing the unlucky weapon, he poked it under his sash, in front. "Now tiffin." He clapped his hands for a servant. "And after tiffin, we go to show ourselves, where men may see what hangs about my neck."

While they ate, the fitful rain of the tropics darkened all the place, filling the air like a downpour of black sand, and splashing white among the leaves. The sun blazed again, as though switched on all at once. And when David and the Sultan passed through the *dessa* gate, to

climb in a broad footpath, they found their mountain world refreshed and brightened, steaming, yet cool and filled with reviving odors.

"Here," said Rama, as he stepped from the shady tunnel of the path, out into broad sunshine, "here on this road every man goes past, sooner or later. We have only to wait."

The highway curved downward before them, into a noble prospect. Rama chose a green bank canopied with rattans, and cast himself down full length. David, sitting alongside, laughed inwardly at their situation: they were to wait (it now appeared) till chance relieved them; to wait under arms, like an absurd pair of Robin Hoods or Quixotes defying all travelers. David could perform his own part with ease enough, and content; for it was by this highway, he perceived, and by no other, that Mary Arnot must pass to the cinchona groves at Batu Blah, up the mountain.

Meanwhile, he thought, the Sultan's public offer of his person would bring little advantage, except the view. Deeply before them, where the road flowed over the brink, an immense green valley of palms spread into bright, clear distance. A little river dashed through the bottom of this valley, red as cocoa, foaming over rocks and rapids. Like toy midgets made from copper, squads of naked boys and girls, far off and far

below, romped in the torrent, swam and dove, or, in the washing-pools, flogged the boulders with colored specks of cloth. The afternoon was like spring, fresh and warm; a pleasant haze everywhere teased the eye to linger in space; and round the encircling volcanoes — engraved to their peaks in fine lines of tillage, or tossing and sweeping, farther off, as sharp billows of misty blue — nothing moved but a cloud-shadow trailing from slope to slope its thunderous indigo blot, or boys' kites darting and tumbling like white pigeons, or a dazzling ostrich plume of crater-smoke, that puffed up, stretched into a horizontal wisp, grew cinder-black along its lower edge, and slowly dissolved. Nearer to hand, the sides of the valley climbed up gradatim from the muddy river, terrace on rice-field terrace, each turf-topped cloison of bank holding the blue sky and gleaming clouds reflected, and spouting to its lower neighbor a bright runnel, so that a multitudinous tinkle of water filled the landscape unceasingly.

"Our man is not there," grumbled the Sultan, as from time to time footsteps pattered in the highway.

No one passed but hill-men on quiet errands. Now and then, a girl in pale *kabaia* glided meekly up or down the road, swaying like a flower on the stalk. Men, skirted in decent colors, halted,

crouched, and lowering their rabbit-ear turbans, murmured, "Peace be with you, lords." All who passed carried some burden, — the men shouldering twin *picul*-baskets of sweet-scented green fodder; grave little boys trotting behind, each with two handfuls of rice-straw slung on a stick, to ape their elders. Sometimes a farmer tugged after him a sheep, a led pony between panniers, a black and balky kid fighting, with pointed hoofs, every inch of the road to slaughter.

"Not our man," repeated the Sultan, watching each figure closely. "Not our man."

None of these passers-by, indeed, gave more than a deferential stare, along with greeting. To their eyes, plainly, Rama was but a young Arab Tuan resting under the trees, who might have hung round his neck an amulet against fever and belly-grief.

"Don't you think," said David modestly, "that we are wasting time?"

The phrase held no meaning for Malayan ears.

"I have said it," retorted Rama, his sullen eyes fixed upon the road. "I show myself to all men, and wait."

The afternoon wore by, to the tinkle of water among terraces. The sunshine deserted the river, glowed in the topmost bundles of green palm, left them extinct, and slanting higher over the valley, began to climb the opposing hills. In the

road, travelers of a different sort went past, at intervals: some tired ploughman, shouldering his frail, crooked plough, and leading his buffalo, a clay-blue monster tied through the nostrils with a yellow withe; or filing wearily up the slope, muscular matrons, their feet and hands mud-painted from the transplanting of young paddy.

All these passed in review; evening crept upward from the valley; and David might hope that now the Sultan had run out the full tether of his patience.

"*Dateng lihat! Dateng lihat!*" crooned a voice near by, ascending. "*Ini malem! Ini malem!*" The words rose gently and musically, like an invocation. "Come see! Come see! This evening!"

Over the brink of the highway climbed three young men dressed as for holiday, slim and supple, close interlocked in friendship, with arms twined about shoulders. The youth in the middle could read; for it was he who chanted slowly, while his companions bent wondering eyes upon a green-paper scroll which he bore and studied.

"*Dateng lihat! — De Paris Cinematograph!*" sang the youthful scholar. "*Gambar idup jang paling besar, jang paling baru di Azia Timur! Pake Lampu Electrik!*"

"But that cannot be!" scoffed one of his unlettered mates. "Pictures that live? No, no! I

have seen the Horse-Comedy in a tent, with tigers, elephants, and painted men tumbling to brass music. And as for lamps, Aladdin could summon djinns! That I know. But pictures *cannot* live! This paper lies, for money!"

The trio halted in the road, to argue.

"May I have a goître, but they *do* live!" bawled the reader at last. He shook the green paper fiercely, and plucked the loose skin of his throat, in asseveration. "May I have a goître, if this is not true! It is not a lie, neither magic. They come and go like *wayang* acting plays on a screen!"

His opponent caught sight of David and the Sultan watching them from under the rattans.

"The gentlemen! Leave it to our lords the gentlemen! They know all things."

The three mountaineers crossed the road and louted low.

"Is it not true, my lords," implored the reader, "that by virtue of your wisdom living men and women appear from the bowels of a lamp, and perform most wonderful and silly deeds? Is there not a Comedy of the Electric Lamp?"

The Sultan returned an equivocal nod, like a wayside cadi who would not bestow judgment rashly.

"Give me the printed paper," he answered. "Let me read the words."

It was the programme for a show of moving pictures, of which the glory was set forth in eloquent Malay. Wonder followed wonder, through ten divisions of fine print: from Number One, *Kabakaran*, the House on Fire, with the Smiting of the Tong-Tong, and the Arrival of the Pump Profession, to Number Ten, *Dansa Nama de Cake Walk*. The comedy would be performed that evening in a spacious tent, at the Fork of the Roads near Batu Blah.

"All this is possible," pronounced the Sultan gravely. "I have seen such doings."

The young mountaineers bowed a graceful *sembah*, gave thanks in quiet chorus, and withdrew. As they climbed, the words of the scholar floated down, exulting over ignorance.

"We shall see all," he declared, in triumph; "all, as the paper promises. And brass music in a great tent, like the tent of your Horse-Comedy; and all the people from nine villages; and many booths with lanterns under the trees, and eatings going forward, and drinkings!"

Their forms and voices vanished among the steep trees.

"It is a sign." From watching thoughtfully the sunset hills, Rama rose to his feet. "We shall go up to this tent. All the people from round about shall see us there."

He started forward. The spectacle of the sun,

a fiery disk wheeling daintily down the hot rim of a western spur, checked him as with a sudden reminder.

"Wait a bit, Bowman. I forgot my prayers last night. See. It's just as the Koran says: 'The long shadows fall prostrate, praising God, morning and evening.'" He faced the departing light, and instantly, alone with his faith, began his solemn reverences, — now standing erect, now bending with hands on knees, now crouching to lay his forehead on the ground. He whispered fervently. "Allah, the great, the merciful and loving-kind, King of the Judgment Day. . . ."

The sun went down. Night filled the valley and ran brimming over the high ravines. In the rice-field terraces, thousands of fireflies hovered like ineffectual sparks, and on the nearest pools, winked among paddy-blades, and were tenderly reflected in the water.

At last the Sultan rose, a shadowy figure in the gloom.

"It is time to follow," he said.

Up a winding ribbon of gray, less and less vague under increasing starlight, the two men marched toward the upper crossways, and the Comedy of the Electric Lamp.

CHAPTER XVI

LAMP-COMEDY

THE road ascended by cranks, and double turns, and sweeping arcs. It plunged through central darkness in the angle of a wooded ravine; or lifting a sharp curved sabre of lava-crest, high over black treetops, it let the travelers cross the bare heavens on a bridge, with nothing below either hand but a field of stars, — as though the world were set up edgewise.

"Night is our friend," declared the Sultan, waving an arm toward the starry gulf. "We shall reach the end of our desires, Bowman, before morning. I feel that. It has come strong inside me. The kriss of Mataram has death on its point. We shall know that riddle, also. The night is good."

He marched on, his spirits evidently rising from level to level, with the altitude. David, meanwhile, made a skeptical follower: the constellations round about, the scented darkness below, held no presages for him; his own kriss, tucked under his armpit, was an incumbrance which, but for politeness, he would gladly have

tossed away; and trudging behind his companion, he smiled to see how powerfully the prospect of a little fun could operate. The Sultan still might talk revenge as loftily as he chose, and climb with Tarquin's ravishing strides; but what now drew him so cheerfully up the mountain was — for a good guess — nothing more than the Comedy of the Lamp.

"Punch and Judy," thought David. "A boy on circus day!"

He himself would not grumble; of the cross-ways up there, one was the right road, the road to Batu Blah.

And now, wherever the black mountain buttresses heaved against the stars, came little human lights which traveled up or down, blinking among trees or bobbing in furrowed fields, but all converging toward one region of the night. Voices called. Neighbors chatted with neighbors, in separate rills of talk that flowed together, single files of gossip that joined and advanced, like the moving lamps, in one direction. From hidden paths alongside, small men and women rose out of a bush or slid down a bank into the highway; paused, group by group, to light their torch of bamboo slivers; then climbed onward in a growing procession.

Under this escort David and Rama came to the Fork of the Roads.

It was here the torches had gathered, and still came trooping. Fringed with pendent boughs, a cavernous white tent glimmered softly, like a shapeless balloon with fire in its belly. Round it, a crowded camp was already springing up, — lighted booths for the hungry, surrounded by pleasant fumes of rice and *sawah* fish a-cooking; lighted counters for the thirsty, with candle-flame refracted through red and yellow bottles of sherbet; an instantaneous bazaar of colored *sarongs*, hanging on lines from tree to tree, like rich arras in a wood; and humbler shops on trestled boards, where home-made cigarettes lay next to sugared tamarinds, and Swedish matches among plough-points fresh from the forge, like devils' hoofs all in a row. The delta between the roads had become a colony, busy as Dido's beehive, but quieter, and happier.

"Ah! How good it smells!" sighed Rama, sniffing the aroma from sago-wrapped tobacco, and spiced cookery, and *areca* juice, and trodden grass. "Ah, how good! And how Hasan, that she-ass belonging to Satan, would pinch his nose at it!" He slipped his arm through David's, and loitered in the loitering crowd. "Thank your prophet, Bowman, we gave Hasan the slip, and all his kind!"

He wriggled forward, murmuring courtesies to clear the way, and gained places for both of

them at a clean little booth. Between a cinchona coolie and the gray-beard *damang* of three villages, they made a hearty supper on curried fish, rice, and grated cocoanut. Their plates were only plantain leaves; but Rama ate with all the gusto of Haroun Al Raschid on a frolic, and David, for appetite, was no bad vizier.

They drank a bottle of red sherbet, to top off their wantonness. The Sultan brought forth cheroots in a lordly case. And while they stood exchanging lights, the brass music suddenly crashed and squealed from the tent.

"It's on! It's on!" Rama tossed his match away. "Let's not miss any. Do you know, Bowman, I've not had such a lark since Chop-Chop won at Happy Valley!"

They followed the flocking mountaineers, wrangled with a sweaty half-caste for their tickets, and were carried on a gay stream of expectancy under the canvas flaps.

"Near the door!" called David, plucking his comrade's sleeve. "Sit near the door!"

The Sultan laughed and nodded.

"Right!" he cried. The loud horns, blaring out a music-hall overture, drowned more than half his words. "Here you are . . . I understand . . . keep an eye for your young lady . . . on the road."

They captured stools near the entrance, and

sat down. Before them hung a broad white sheet, over a platform. The motley audience poured throughout the tent, discussing, beckoning, subsiding into banks of softly blended color. The third-class rows, in front, bristled with rabbit-ear turbans; but elsewhere appeared the black felt hats and crimson-braided queues of Chinese toko-men; the shaven polls and broad, important backs of Dutch planters, all in white; and here and there, a restless party of half-caste girls, with the same sweetmeat-boxes, the same giggling whispers, the same loose-working shoulder-blades as those which fill an afternoon theatre in the Western hemisphere.

"Before the lamps . . . put out," came the Sultan's voice, "better show myself . . . good chance!"

He stood up, and slowly turning as on a pivot, scanned the whole assembly with serene and haughty composure. A lantern, close by, threw so generous a light upon him that for the moment his torso of white linen, his olive-golden face, with its fine curves of eyebrow, lip, and nostril, became the chief conspicuous details in a crowded picture. Rama took a thoughtful survey, round about twice, as if hunting for a friend. His slender brown fingers played with the gold chain carelessly, and twiddled the packet on his breast.

"Capital. There's our man." He sat down, smiling oddly. "All going well . . . I hoped so!"

As though he had given a signal, the orchestra ceased its braying. The musicians — Javan boys caught in the wilds, and transformed with blue and buttons — now laid aside their nickeled horns and cornets, skipped about the tent, lowered and blew out the lanterns. Their leader, a gray-haired Australian with the face of a beachcomber, squeezed a few last groans from his accordeon, and rising threaded his way to the rear. All faces turned to watch, as he began tampering with a black machine that pointed, Gatling-wise, over the heads of the crowd. Darkness fell. A vicious hiss and sputter succeeded; a searchlight ray tilted through the gloom; a white circle, springing out on the curtain ahead, turned suddenly to gray; and there, before the murmuring company, flickered and shifted the great *Gambar Idup*, the Live Picture of a House on Fire.

The djinns were liberated; the Lamp had begun its comedy. The Sultan, though playing cynic at first, grew more and more gravely absorbed in these quick-changing dreams. David could never recall more than a disturbed and fleeting impression of them; in part because the third-class ranks, as one man, climbed upon their stools before him, and peered back into the glaring

nozzle of the machine, to study this living magic at the source; in part because, at every sound outside the open door, he strained both eye and ear for movements of travel on the highway; in part because there crept over him that gradual unrest which comes, or seems to come, from being watched by a person unknown and undiscoverable, in a crowd. He caught himself peeping at his neighbors, and fidgeting.

"Rama," he leaned across, to whisper; "Rama, when you stood up then, — what was it?"

The Sultan could not take his eyes from the shivering gray light on the screen. A nervous Parisian bridegroom there, dressed for his wedding, now ran at top speed through fragments of suburban and rural scenery, leading a furious pack of shopkeepers, peasants, garbage-men, gendarmes, dogs, and fat women, to the Inevitable Catastrophe in a duck-pond.

"When I stood up? Oh, yes," came the answer. Rama nodded impatiently toward his left shoulder. "Over there — clear over — by the canvas. Your friend the stable parrot. He saw us. It 's all right."

David looked sharply along the row. They themselves were visible enough, in the stray gleam from a lamp outdoors. The shimmering screen, also, threw reflections that revealed a few dusky faces near by. But elsewhere, the

tent stretched as black as a cavern. David gave up the scrutiny, and tried, by watching the inane pictures come and go, to forget his uncomfortable knowledge. Somebody, none the less, remained staring at him from the dark.

Number Eight of the Lamp-Comedy was now extinguished. Number Nine, "Bath Not Finish-Finish" (portraying a frantic gentleman who would undress, but whose clothes flew back and multiplied upon him), passed under the mild, polite regard of the audience. There remained only Number Ten, *Dansa Nama de Cake Walk.* The boys in buttons went scampering forward to their station, caught up their horns, blew an Asiatic blast, and began vamping their accompaniment to the Australian's accordeon, and the Australian idea of negro melody.

"No more pictures?"

The Lamp emitted nothing but glare, striking on the sheet a vacant circle, intensely white.

"No more pictures?" repeated the Sultan mournfully; and then, catching his breath in a little gasp, "Oh, look, Bowman! Look at her! See, see!"

He craned forward eagerly, and David with him.

Along the platform, with a skip and a bound into the target of light, danced a girl in black and red, her petticoats foaming at the edge of short

skirts. She tossed her head with a flounce of amazingly yellow hair, raised a powerful voice, and began to sing.

"What action!" whispered Rama. "Look, by Jove! What an action that girl has!"

It was the lady of the anonymous hotel at Sourabaya, the daughter of music and temperament, Miss Mary Naves. Prancing like a filly, she crossed and recrossed the lighted circle, her body swaying backward at a ridiculous angle, her feet climbing as on a treadmill, her hands flapping loosely to the rhythm of brass music. Back and forth she went, singing loudly, — a vivid carnival figure in scarlet, black, and yellow.

"What energy!" exclaimed the Sultan, again and again. "What action! My word, what an action! It beats the gee-gees, eh?" He nodded, approving critically. "Her hair is bright as new hemp. I say, Bowman, is *your* young lady anything like her?"

The audience did not share his delight. They watched the dancer with a sedate pity, like men long schooled in the traditions not only of music but of grace in women; and when Miss Naves had cut her highest caper, run trippingly from the platform, and disappeared behind the curtain, all hands rose in silence to file out. The foreign artist had won a few tolerant grins, but nothing more.

"A clumsy *ronggeng*," laughed a native. "A clumsy *ronggeng*, that Dutch woman."

"True," replied another voice. "And her colors pained the eye."

The Australian, with a sour, dejected air, shut off his lamp. The crowd streamed out in darkness.

"Wait, Rama." David set his back against a tent-pole, and peered closely into all the faces moving past. "I want to catch that fellow who stared at us."

"I doubt if you can." Rama lingered willingly enough, but bore no hand in the search; for his eyes never left the platform and the darkened sheet. He appeared to expect another vision of delight. "How large and fine that girl was! Do you suppose, Bowman, we could talk with her? — You won't find your man," he added petulantly. "Where's the use? It was your stable parrot, and he's gone. We shan't find him. But he shall find us; and before long, unless I 'm greatly mistaken."

The Sultan proved a prophet, at least by half. They caught no one. Face after brown face flowed calmly by in the throng; but not one which they knew, or which, in passing, lighted with more than a mild glance of interest. The final stragglers trailed out. The tent yawned empty.

"Slipped under the canvas. He'll come again;

no hurry." The Sultan turned away, sighing. "Should like to see that girl, though, close to."

Poor Mary Naves could ill spare any such bits of admiration. Fate, at that moment, was dealing her a measure of something else. The Australian, carrying a lantern, had slouched behind the white screen.

"Crying, are you?" he snarled. "Well, you got the right! You got the right to cry!"

A new kind of Living Comedy flickered, black and magnified, on the deserted theatre, — an after-piece more simple, direct, and real than any which had played by invention. The Australian's lean and hulking silhouette overtopped the sheet. Below, another shadow sprang into place, — the likeness of Mary Naves, who sat with her head propped in her hands, and wept.

"You know why, too!" rose the spiteful voice of her master. "They all saw it, an' so did I, an' so did you! What in God's world ever tempted me to hire — An' every night the same! Why, you know what you are? You 're a failure! Rank. That 's what!" He broke into loud and virulent oaths. "Voice? About as much as a More-pork! Go on, cry —"

The shadow of Mary Naves made no reply, but cowered somewhat lower, and shook somewhat more than the guttering lantern warranted.

"Cry! Y' ought to, you —"

David had seen enough of this sciomachy, had heard too much. He rounded both platform and sheet, to burst in between the puppets themselves. The unfortunate dancer — now dressed in a plain white that somehow made her the more forlorn — sat huddled on a stool. She cried, not from rage or woman's habit, but with great sobs of loneliness.

David's chief knuckle vibrated under the Australian's nose.

"You!" he said. "You!" The fellow backed gently away, till he stepped on his accordeon. He stood there, pale and chopfallen, without spirit enough to pick the thing up.

"You say another word to that woman!"

Miss Naves lifted her face, all woe-begone; then covered it again, as though such deliverers were nothing.

"What can I do for you?" said David. "Can't I help you?"

"No-o-o! You're a man," she whimpered. "You ain't a wo-wo-woman!"

A bland voice rose in persuasion.

"Madam!" The Sultan, with a smile at once droll and winning, stood before her. "Now I. I enjoyed your dancing, so very much. Really I did, you know. It was — ah — extremely beautiful."

The Failure once more lifted her yellow head.

From glistening eyes she darted a queer look at the Sultan, — a look half in gratitude, half in distrust of his compliment and his race.

"Oh, go away!" she moaned. The Amazonian shoulders heaved. "Get out, all o' you! I don't care now — I — I — Oh, let me alone!"

Her comforters, embarrassed at this repulse, found nothing adequate to say. The Australian sourly grinned, and, taking heart, nursed his accordeon. Silence followed, until broken by sounds from without.

A slow thud of hoofs drew near in the road. Horses were climbing up-hill at a walk.

"Here she is," the Sultan whispered. "Your lady 's coming. Miss Arnot—"

The prompting was needless.

"Remember what I tell you!" cried David. "I'll be back!" With a threatening nod to the Master of the Lamp, he skirted the platform and went hurdling over campstools in the tent.

Through the bazaar, already half dismantled, he ran to the edge of the highway. Three swinging lanterns, borne by barefoot grooms, lighted an approaching cavalcade, — two women and a bulky man, all clothed and helmeted in white, and mounted on brisk ponies, homeward bound.

"Good-evening." The horseman raised his crop, in civil answer to David's bow. Another voice echoed his words, a little blaze-faced pony

swerved to the roadside, and from her saddle Mary Arnot leaned to search the darkness.

"Is it you, Mr. Bowman?" The hint of eagerness in her voice, the least half-tone of expectation, repaid all his endeavor. "Mrs. Hemmes, here he is!"

A pleasant, plump little matron drew rein, smiling in the lantern light. Her husband, the burly cavalier, wheeled his mount and shook hands heartily.

"You 'll come up with us, won't you, Mr. Bowman?" he propounded, in the slow, kindly bass of a heavyweight. "Our bungalow has a bachelors' wing."

"I'd be very glad," began David; "but I'm staying with a friend — " He turned uneasily for a backward glance, and found the Sultan standing at his elbow, — a cool, sedate young figure from the old world. "I'm staying with my friend the — ah — that is — Tuan Rama."

The Sultan bowed to all, but lowest, and with least pride, to Mary Arnot.

"Oh, bring him along," cried the jovial planter. He stared closer for an instant, then smiled wickedly. "Tuan Rama, I think we met once. Penang, was it?"

The Sultan gave a perceptible start, and lowered his fez in gloomy acknowledgment.

"That may have been," he replied, sulking.

"It's all right," laughed the other. "I've no connection with government. I do hope you'll give us the honor."

The offended prince bowed stiffly. As he did so, light from a shifting lantern ran and rippled on his gold chain.

Miss Arnot's pony winced and gathered his elbows, as though misunderstanding some movement of his rider. The girl herself said nothing, but her eyes dwelled curiously on the suspended packet.

"I know, madam." Rama nodded, looking up at her by stealth. "It is yours, I know. And dear to you. But will you let me keep it, only for a little? I have made a wow — no: what you call, a vow? A promise. You will let me take this, till to-morrow?"

He touched the packet lightly. The girl looked over to David, wondering; then back to the slim, courtly figure that waited beside her stirrup. Pride and youthful melancholy she must have read in Rama's face, and something more; for her own lighted with a grave smile.

"Keep it for me," she answered. "I don't understand at all. But I can trust you, Tuan Rama."

The Sultan bowed, and falling back a pace with military precision, tossed up his head like a victorious king. His face, in the lantern light, shone transfigured.

"Ah!" He loosed a great breath, as though relieved from pressure; and gripping David's hand secretly, "Bowman," he whispered, "it is true! The old tales and poems do not lie!"

There was no time to ask his meaning. White man and Malay stood side by side, admiring her together, when suddenly past them ran a tall woman in white, headlong for the centre of the group.

"O lady, lady!" wailed poor Mary Naves, flinging her big arms helplessly over the bridle-rein, and mingling her hemp-colored hair with the bay locks of the pony, "O Miss Arnot, you was good to me aboard ship! You 're a wo-wo-woman!" The mane stifled her blubbering. "You can help me! Can't you? Can't you? I want to go home, and I ain't got any!"

The other Mary, dismissing her own troubles, bent over this lowly namesake. They two had withdrawn, apart and alone, like Rama at his evening prayers. The rude glow of the lanterns, tossed upward from beneath, showed David more than he had guessed, even at the outset. The girl's face above him was the face in the silver locket, not only alive, but endowed with the further life of pity and sisterhood.

CHAPTER XVII

BATU BLAH

THE planter's wife backed her little Timor mare alongside, to give that reinforcement which woman has ready for woman. They held a conclave in the open road, with no men admitted. The bright-haired fugitive told her story, dolorous bit by bit, through the pony's mane.

"Poor thing!" The matron's voice escaped their privacy. "No . . . Quite right, Mary dear . . . No: we can't leave her in such . . . Why, of course!"

Miss Arnot laid her hand on the other Mary's shoulder, and sat thinking. Her eyes lighted; a whimsical smile played about them, and trembled at her lips. David knew that smile as well as though he had seen it before. She spoke, — at some length, but in what manner he could not hear. Mrs. Hemmes made a quick gesture of surprise, laughed once outright, and shook with silent mirth.

"But seriously," continued the girl, "I do need one. Chatra forced me to dismiss her . . . And in this way, at least to Singapore . . ."

Miss Naves let go her clasp, and rose, ungainly but ecstatic.

"O lady! Try me!" She pawed at the girl's hand, tried to capture it, tried to embrace her, saddle, reins, and all. "O miss! I've stood that 's long 's I could! Do gimme just one chance! I 'd follow you over the world's end, miss, let alone Singapore! Try me, oh do! God bless you for thinking it!"

The pony, sharing by mistake some of this wild endearment, pranced and reared. Miss Arnot managed him quietly, without looking away from her petitioner.

"There, there!" Smiling, she rebuked them both. "I won't have a maid who frightens horses! But we can try each other. Come to Mrs. Hemmes's bungalow, and we'll talk of this further."

Stock-still in clumsy adoration, Miss Naves looked up at her through brimming eyes.

"You 'll never be sorry, miss; never!" she declared hoarsely; then turning away, took the pony's muzzle between her hands, and kissed the white blaze on his forehead. "There. You'll find me quiet and willing, miss, always; and — and now I 'll go speak about my box."

She parted the lantern-bearers, and slipped off toward the tent, dabbing her eyes as she ran. The burly Mr. Hemmes chuckled, and rode after.

"O Mary, my dear," laughed his wife. "What next? A parable: I've seen a parable acted! Do you always pick your servants out of byways and hedges?"

Miss Arnot could parry questions, not without skill.

"No," she retorted slyly. "Chatra came recommended by you, Kate. This poor silly thing is quite honest. We talked, on board ship."

Hemmes cantered back, presently, with the blonde Amazon skipping beside his pony.

"All settled. Come on!" he cried gayly. The little squadron started up-hill once more, the lantern-coolies ahead, Miss Naves between the two horsewomen, Rama and David marching as rear-guard. The stalwart proprietor of Batu Blah rode alongside, in high spirits.

"My word, we frightened the accordeon fellow!" he proclaimed. "What do you suppose, Kate? That man in the tent was old Shypoo Anderson, no less! Used to hang round Cossack, in the eighties, — my bachelor days. Hardest case on the beach; always beast-o, he was, uncommonly beast-o, even for Cossack. What? Just now? No, he gave us no trouble. I knew him too well. Badly wanted, in too many towns. Old Shypoo Anderson!"

The big planter laughed, like a man sharply reminded of other days, — of the rough days

when he was younger, lighter in the saddle, handier with ropes and oars. While the company climbed, horse and foot, he beguiled their way with tales and memories; for this bulky married man, it seemed, had been a rover among tropic islands, and still carried in his head queer ports and forsaken harbors, as a citizen carries the names of familiar streets.

"Shypoo Anderson! How much a man forgets!" he lamented. "And Tin-ribs, and Dongarra, and the smell of Peed's store!" His talk, now fairly turned loose, went ranging among old times and odd places, — east and west from the Maldives to Christmas, north and south from Macquarie to "Eight-Piecee-Hill" of the Lu-Chus. A chance word from David brought him quickly back to the rear. "Philippines, did you say, Mr. Bowman? Why, then you must know . . ."

Thus, chatting steadily, he marshaled them past the tall Split Rock which gave its name to his plantation, and up a carriage-road winding under dark cinchonas. A stone bungalow, white-washed, and lighted by small veranda lamps, glimmered before them like a frosted birthday cake of Doric outlines. The troop swung round the back-nets of a tennis-court, rode through a dense and spacious flower-garden, and halted at the veranda.

"Justus dear," called Mrs. Hemmes, dismounting, and cutting her husband short in his liveliest narrative, "will you have the boys make all ready in the bachelors' wing? Mary, I'll show the maid your quarters. Come, Justus, come; you dreadful old gossip!"

The planter laughed, broke off his deep-voiced Odyssey of the archipelagoes, and meekly went about the errands of his Penelope.

Miss Arnot, David, and the prince, thus left to themselves in the veranda, had soon comfortably ranged their chairs round a table, where they might talk by lamplight. The mountain air, instead of growing cool, had turned oppressive and sultry; and far down before their view, where night obliterated the plains, heat-lightning ran in tremors, and revealed white edges of cloud.

The Sultan would not sit until he had bowed formally, and spoken.

"Madam." His pale brown face wore an unwonted brightness; and under their curved, thick lids, his great eyes twinkled with a new vivacity, a kind of elfin mischief. "Madam, there are persons who would not fling a bone to Katmîr, the dog of the Seven Sleepers. And there are fools who give without thinking. But to think and grant quickly — to think and give rightly, while a horse can flick his ear — that is the trade of princes."

Miss Arnot looked a good deal puzzled.

"I don't quite follow."

"I mean," said the Sultan, — and he lifted the packet by its gold chain, — "you never asked me why. You thought, and said, 'Keep it.' You honored a stranger; and suddenly, — that is double honor."

She laughed, and put the compliment aside, motioning toward his chair.

"A man's face often speaks for him, Tuan Rama."

"It may be." He sat down, beside David; and for a time, smiling and meditating, looked out across the vague epaulment of garden flowers, to where the heat-lightning fluttered the clouds above the plains. "It may be. Yet there 's something more. And what? It is hard to say — hard. See: it is thus. A butterfly hawk — very tiny — flies, very quick, from one tree to another tree. What man will take a pen, and draw you the line that bird has drawn? Or what strong man will break that line? The bird spun it, of air. It is a thing done, forever. An act. Stronger than iron, but not seen at all. So between souls . . ."

Rama's voice, gentle and persuading, trailed off into silence. His brown hand, groping before him as for some word at the finger-tips, dropped into his lap.

"Oh, very hard to say!" he laughed; then, appealing to Miss Arnot, with a sudden, bright, boyish look, "Will you let me tell you in a story?"

David never liked him better, or the girl half so well, as now when they agreed, and turned, with a nod and a smile, for his consent.

The Sultan, watching the soft play of lightning over the trees, took up his allegory.

"In the old days," he began slowly, "Rajah Suran marched upon his elephant to battle. In his army went a youth named Perak, my mother's forefather. At the Emerald Place, they met the host of Rajah Chulan coming on like sea-waves, with horses and elephants like islands, and a golden jungle of banners. The armies rushed together. The shock was loud as Gabriel's voice, or the Blast that makes All, Nothing. Bull elephant and bull elephant whetted their tusks, and gored; horses bit horses; the dust and the flying of arrows blinded the sky like an eclipse, so that in the darkness men cried *amok* on their friends, till blood laid the dust. And Rajah Suran pierced Rajah Chulan with an arrow, so that he fell dead from his high elephant, like a monkey from a palm. All this is written in Sajarat Malayu.

"Now in that battle thousands of brave men fought, and tens of thousands; but the bravest of all was the young man Perak, my forefather and my mother's; for he raged among them like

a tiger's cub among chickens, when they run squawking. So all men cried: 'Perak, the bravest in two armies!' "

Rama spoke in a low chant; he made no gesture, but his face glowed.

"The women waited in the city," he continued. "Ampu, the rajah's daughter, sat on a balcony of black stone. She was a brave woman, of lofty spirit. The army returned, and passed below her. She wore in her hair a single champaka blossom. (This Ampu was very beautiful, they say — beautiful as my mother, who died when I was a child.) So the nobles passed, in their finest war-clothes, and the horsemen, and the elephants with painted foreheads; they all marched by in order, and young Perak among them, on foot, plainly dressed. No word of him had reached the city; for the host came in solemnly, without shouting. But Ampu looked down from her black stone balcony, and Perak, up from the crowd. And so their eyes met."

Rama paused, bent on his hearers a troubled frown, and like a marksman who has missed his aim, gave a short laugh of vexation.

"How shall you understand?" he cried. "This is *not* a story of love I am telling! — Ampu saw the young man. The look passed between them, as I have said: as the little butterfly hawk darts from one tree to another. She had never heard

Perak's name. He was marching among ten thousand men. But the rajah's daughter took the single blossom from her hair, and tossed it down to him — to him alone. And Perak, catching it, marched on. — That is all my story."

The speaker leaned back in his chair, but watched Miss Arnot eagerly, with wide, serious eyes. David watched also. The lamplight touched her hair in bronze gleams, powdery specks of radiance, like the sunshine motes in a darkened room. She sat looking out from the veranda, thoughtfully. Over a dark fringe of cinchonas, the clouds came rolling up, now and then blanched by the warm lightning, that struck through them as through ragged paper-lanterns. Thunder had been grumbling in the plains; and now a nearer burst of it came shuddering up the ravine, like surf crashing into a split promontory.

"I think," said Mary Arnot, when the sound rolled aside, "I think I understand you, Tuan Rama." Turning, she met his eyes; her own, dark blue and lighted from within, answered him frankly and freely. "Your story makes me very proud, and very glad. If I could show you that I understand —" She paused, recalling something. A fine color flushed in her cheeks. "Will this help, in part? We, in our tongue, have a poet who tells us — how is it, again? —

"'To count the life of battle good,
And dear the land that gave you birth,
And dearer yet the brotherhood
That binds the brave of all the earth.'"

The Sultan whipped out of his chair, bowed to her, and stood erect.

"Thank you!" His voice trembled with delight. "I thought it was so, before. I knew it was so, when we met!"

Footsteps returned along the tiled veranda. Miss Arnot rose.

"Our hostess has had a long day of it. We shall see each other to-morrow?" And before Mrs. Hemmes came within earshot, the girl held out her hand quickly to David. "You have forgiven me?"

"Forgiven you?" he stammered, in bewilderment. "For what?"

"For thinking of myself," she answered. "For sending you into danger. As if — as if — Well, I was ashamed! Have you? Do you?"

At that, David forgot everything. It was the fault of her question; her hand; her eyes, that shone so near and with such candor. A hundred resolves and cautions, well made and long pent, flew down the wind like straws.

"Miss Arnot," he blurted, "there should never be such talk between us!"

Her hand was gone in a flash.

"Good-night, then." Her smile remained

friendly, but there was trouble in it, and alteration. "Thank you, Mr. Bowman; and you, Tuan Rama. — Yes, Kate, I 'm coming." She drew back, as Mrs. Hemmes arrived. "Good-night!"

The two women had hardly disappeared into the house, when the clouds, rolling up from the plains, carried the breastwork of cinchona tops, and swept overhead. Thunder shook the whole plantation; the air became a subtle white flame, quivering everywhere, and showing all the leaves a brilliant green, all the garden flowers motionless, bright red and vivid white. Then in blinding darkness, without wind, a few heavy drops of rain spat on the driveway and the steps.

"Shower 's coming," said David, gruffly. "Let 's to quarters."

In the bachelors' wing, a low, detached building on the right, their veranda lamps burned under a trellis or pergola. Toward this the two friends ran, pelted with multiplying drops.

Once in shelter between the lamps, Rama broke out laughing, quietly. The rain had streaked his face like tears, and beaded the links of his chain with pendants brighter than glass.

"Not to her!" he panted, holding David's arm. "Not to her! Don't try, my dear chap." His big eyes danced in shrewd and sober mockery. "*You* cannot talk to women! You have a heart of gold, but the brains of a buffalo!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AMOK

DAVID, by no means in such high feather, flung his borrowed kriss clattering on the table.

"I dare say they're not very good," he growled.

"What?" laughed Rama. "What are not?"

"My brains," came the surly answer. "But they let me see one thing plain enough."

"Really?" mocked the Sultan. "And what is that?"

David looked down, askance, at the gold chain, the bright beads of water, and the packet.

"That thing," he replied.

"Oh, this?" Rama dandled the necklace, proudly. "It's all right, dear chap. She said so. Don't fret. We understand each other, that girl and I."

David wheeled short, and began a little sentry-go up and down the veranda. As he paced, the lightning came and went in unequal flashes, that turned the flame of the lamp to a colorless smoke, and the projecting vines of the trellis, outside, to a sharp black network aching on the retina.

Rama suddenly blocked the way.

"Come, come," he entreated. "What have I said, Bowman? I have made you angry?"

Thus halted and outfaced, David came forth plump with all his discontents.

"Rama, you ought — we ought to know better! Oh, there's no reason for you to look surprised! I think you remember what happened by the Sultan Muda's grave; and how poor Amat went, this morning; and the particular pains you took to show yourself down there in Shypoo What-you-call-it's tent!"

"Ah!" said his friend slowly. "You mean the Thing — whatever it is — the Thing will follow us here?"

"You're a dab at guessing," answered David.

The Sultan squinted up with eyes full of satirical cunning.

"O wise man!" he cried. "Of *course* the Thing will! I wanted it to! Are you afraid?"

David wagged his head, muttering.

"You bet I'm afraid." Anger and worry contended in his voice. "A carabao's brains will help me *that* far. Man, can't you see?" he burst out passionately. "Here we are, of all places in the world, with Miss Arnot under the same roof! How can we tell, if the — the Thing — will look for us first? It gave Amat finish, this morning, — not us."

Rama, stepping back, opened his lips, and

rounded them into a droll circle — a grimace that in every line spelled amazement and chagrin.

"I never thought of it!" he declared. "You're right, very right. I never thought." He stared at the lamp, discomfited. "You people always put the women first, don't you? I forgot."

David made no reply.

"We can watch," the culprit suggested lamely. "We must watch, all night."

The two men regarded each other silently, with the same queer look of concern, of an anxiety to which neither of them could put a name. Each waited for the other to speak, and then, turning irresolutely to the edge of their little cloister, stood looking out into the rain. The night held but one sound, the sound of water: an immense continual splashing, mixed with a clean quick spatter among the leaves of the jutting trellis. Flash followed flash, now separate, now slurred into a long, throbbing unity of brilliance, as though some reckless child were playing with all the lights of the world. The great raindrops, falling perpendicular, glittered like steel bullets, or hopped upon the ground as white and lively as hail. The reddish floor of the tennis-court, the gray lines cutting it into squares, every wire in the mesh of the back stop-nets, shivered out with unearthly prominence. Colors glowed: the green enamel of dripping leaves; the pink rose-petal

of a folded cloud; the sky, in rents and patches, midsummer blue. Darkness erased all these, — no common darkness, but something final and savage, like the loss of sight forever. Thunder followed, as if numberless hawsers were parting all at once, and colossal planks cracking into splinters. Then, quickly as it had come, the storm swept up the mountain and away. Stars, brightly washed, glittered above the cinchonas.

The last departing flash lighted the last of the rain.

"Did you see?" David laid his hand on Rama's arm. Both men leaned out from the veranda steps.

Some one had appeared for an instant; some one in white, running toward them, through a shower like Danaë's turned to silver. This person arrived in a hurry, splashing through puddles.

"Mr. Bowman!" came a breathless whisper. "Mr. Bowman!"

The runner had stopped.

"Here!" called David. "What is it?"

Under the trellis and up the steps fluttered Mary Naves, clutching her garments about her. Rain had darkened the yellow hair, and beaten it profusely. The lamps — dull from the recent excess of light — disclosed a face whiter than her dress.

She looked straight at David, catching her breath, and nodding as if he already understood.

"I saw it again," she quavered. "It was looking in my window."

Like one who had explained everything, she turned aside, crossed her arms, propped them weakly against a pillar, and stood burying her forehead there.

"When?" said David. "When was this?"

Miss Naves could only shake and whimper.

"A nawful face!" she at last contrived to answer. "Looking in my window—looking.—Same's at Sourabaya. Just now. A big head in a red cloth."

The Sultan made the first movement.

"The Thing has come." He slipped out of his sandals, and gave a little shiver of excitement. "*Tupai Tanah.* Red as a ground-squirrel. The Thing has come."

He spoke quietly, but drew himself up, inflated with the pride of a man whose moment is at hand. From his waist he drew the legendary kriss of Mataram, and with a snap of the forearm sent the wooden scabbard flying over the garden, half-way to the tennis-court. The poisonous green blade, veined with silver, quivered taut in his grip.

"Now, Bowman, my friend." His curving lips parted in a smile; his eyes were hard and bright as a cat's. "Now we shall see if Death *is* on the point. The time has come, and the Thing."

He moved across, and stood beside Mary Naves.

"Where is it now?" he asked, in a grave, considerate voice. "Which way did it go, this face in the red cloth?"

The trembling messenger roused herself, to wave one hand vaguely.

"Behind the house. Round the house, behind."

Rama beckoned to David, with an air of command.

"Take your weapon, there. Blow out the lamps."

Leaving the bachelors' wing in darkness, they cleared the props of the trellis, crossed the driveway, clung to the grass borders and the deeper shadow of the garden, and thus ran silently toward the bungalow. Great stars burned overhead, in all quarters of heaven. Water still gushed from spouts and channels, but with diminishing noises. The night was clear, the air cold and nipping.

They skirted the main veranda, now dark as a tunnel, except where the upper halves of three farthest windows glowed above their black screens. To David, as he and his leader stole by the first of these, it was strange and startling to hear Mr. Hemmes's jovial voice inside his room.

"Good to be home again, is n't it, Kate?" A yawn followed this domestic sentiment. "I must go, presently, and see the bachelors are all stowed comfy, I suppose."

The bachelors won past without detection. Like a burglar reconnoitring, with every sense at full stretch, David caught a fluttering sound behind him. He turned. Mary Naves tagged at heel, wringing her hands like a dim and stalwart Lady Macbeth.

"Go back!" he whispered fiercely. "Go back! We can't have you —"

"I don't dare to," she wailed. "I can't stay — in the dark."

David took her hand quietly.

"Is that Miss Arnot's room?" He pointed his kriss at the middle square of orange light. "Is her door locked? And yours the next? — Good! — Now, do you care anything about *her?*"

The girl sobbed out something incoherent, but nodded vigorously.

"Then go inside your room, and listen. Either you don't care — a straw — or else go! Watch by your front window, there. If anybody comes but us, call for Mr. Hemmes. Go, I tell you!"

The poor Amazon gathered all her forces, and made for the veranda, casting many a fearful glance behind her into the gloom.

Racing through wet grass and shallow puddles,

David overtook the Sultan round the corner of the bungalow. They now advanced by starlight only, and with increasing caution at every step, their hearing so confused by the widespread trickle of waters draining off the mountain-side, that constantly they stopped and listened to imaginary footfalls. On their left hand loomed the whitewashed bungalow, glimmering faint and unsubstantial as a cloud. For fear of being seen on this background, they kept a good offing.

"Behind the house," their frightened spy had said; but when at last, creeping quickly from bush to bush, they had outflanked the rear veranda, they found themselves the only prowling shadows there. The back of the building showed as another dark, pillared corridor; and though a line of darker upright forms stood along it, like posted sentinels, these gradually resolved themselves into nothing more dreadful than the back doors of room after room, all safely shut.

Down this long line Rama flitted confidently, his bare feet making no sound on the wet earth. David, in boots, labored to maintain both equal pace and equal silence.

They had crossed a tiled walk which joined the rear veranda to some outlying kitchen, and had run almost the whole length of the bungalow, when suddenly both stopped, colliding in the darkness.

A shrill cry had broken out. They knew it, at once, for the untimely crowing of a game-cock, near by; yet the effect, the shattering of that mountain stillness, held both men close in their tracks. The stir and trickle of water grew audible once more. And then David felt a bristling tremor pass through his companion's body.

"I see it!" Rama whispered in his ear. "Going round the far end of our quarters. I see it!"

David could not, though staring his hardest. He had no course but to trust the Sultan's eyesight, and to follow, at even greater speed, the gray blur of his jacket, as it flew toward the bachelors' wing, veered to the left, and vanished round the last corner. The child's riddle ran foolishly in David's head: "Round the house, and round the house . . ."

He ended that circuit in a man's outstretched arms.

"Down, down!" ordered Rama ferociously, under his breath. "Down by this bush! Quick! The Thing is in our room."

They squatted under black leaves that drenched them with rainwater. When this little shower ended, David could pick out a few shadowy hints of their position. They were crouching under a low shrub, somewhere between the tennis-court and their pergola. The

ground felt sopping under hands and knees, the air bitterly cold.

"Quiet!" whispered his companion. "Something else comes."

A slow tread, softly crunching the wet sand in the driveway, drew toward them from the main bungalow. It stopped. Some yards off, a large white figure halted. Mr. Justus Hemmes had evidently come to bid his bachelors good-night, and found their lamps put out; for a moment later the white bulk moved away, the footsteps departed. In deep bass notes, like the drone of a good-natured bumble-bee, the planter hummed an air as he went back to his wife. He would report all quiet.

"Now!" whispered Rama, with fiery satisfaction. "Now we have it to ourselves."

As the minutes lagged by, this opinion seemed literally true. The veranda before them, overhung by the trellis, showed black and impenetrable as the face of a rock; and yet, had anything moved never so lightly inside, the watchers would have known. So, at least, thought David; for now that all the little noises of draining water had passed away, and left only a crisp, irregular dripping among the trees, he felt no other change in the stillness roundabout. Muscles in arm and shoulder began to ache, from their cramping in the long suspense.

Another shrill challenge from the game-cock startled him; and after unlimited waiting, yet another. The outbreak roused queer echoes in David's memory — Simon Peter; the platform at Elsinore; a cruel main that he had seen two cocks fight aboard a lorcha, in the Pasig; spring mornings at home, the warm air, and a perfume of bonfires over the countryside. Why should he remember all these, in a jumble? And why would nothing happen?

Then, in the dark, once more he felt his companion shiver and bristle, like a dog about to growl.

From under the trellis, a shadow formed in the starlight. Greater than a man, low and long, with the contour and movement of a quadruped, it came slowly out, sheered off, and was creeping toward the tennis-court.

The Sultan sprang afoot, and walked deliberately up to it.

"I have what you want," he said quietly, in his native tongue. "*Mari sini.* Come here, and take it."

At his call, the shade gave a bound, suffered a convolving leap or throe, and split in twain. It became the figures of two men, running for the end of the back stop-nets. The Sultan gave chase.

On the smooth floor of the court, David overtook them, just as all three, snarling like cats,

rushed together in a knot. He plunged at random, caught a naked arm, and threw one man clear of the scrimmage. As he did so, the other two staggered apart, and began a singular dance, face to face, dodging each other.

"Keep off! Keep off!" panted Rama's voice. "Don't come between! Take your own — Amok, amok!"

The cry ended in a hurried clash and grating, as when a carver whets knife on steel. The dancers had wheeled close, and jumped asunder.

David obeyed the voice, turned to meet the fresh onslaught of the man he had flung aside. From the gray stripe of the service-line, a sprawling black shape recoiled and came at him. He had time to see this rise off the ground; to pull the scabbarded kriss from his armpit, to draw, to balance it in his hand; but also, and as a lifelong wonder, to find that no white man could use any such weapon. He tossed it away, and welcomed his enemy with bare fists.

He delivered a clean blow, acknowledged by a grunt. But a sting under the left ear told him that something sharp had missed his throat, and that the outcome lay between boxer and fencer. David laughed, and caught a glimpse of the tropic stars. It had never entered any dream, that he should fight for dear life on a tennis-court.

His man returned, ready, but circling wide.

David kept his guard partly by shadow, partly by the dim whiteness of a breech-clout. This flew toward him, low and wriggling. He struck out with all his might, felt a hot pain slice along his forearm, and heard, rather than saw, a solid body fall at his feet.

He was not surprised that it lay there without moving; for his fist had gone home at full swing, and was numb from the shock.

Behind him, the whetting and grating had stopped. A sick man lay on the ground, and coughed.

"Oh, the good fight!" Rama was chanting, in ecstasy. "Oh, the good fight!"

As David turned, he saw a light coming swiftly toward them from the bungalow.

"What's wrong, gentlemen?" sounded the deep voice of Mr. Hemmes. He carried a small tin lamp in one hand, and with the other shaded his eyes. "I thought you were both in bed. What's happened?"

Suddenly there was no more coughing.

"I don't know," said David. "Fetch your lamp, and see."

The planter crossed the court, and bending, brought his forehead below the lamp, so that he had the air of a stout miner dressed in white pajamas. He peered about him, then puckered his lips for a mute whistle.

"Bad pidgin," was all that he said.

The trio exchanged a look of grim assent. Among them, tumbled across the broad tape at the base-line, a brown man lay flat on his back, with one knee drawn tightly up, one bronze hand rigidly gripping his dirty loin-cloth, as if he had still been aware of pain. His body glistened with rain and sweat. A strip of scarlet cotton — his turban, half torn away in the struggle — formed a neat and vivid figure six on the wet ground. Part over his face, part blown aside, his hair shone in tangled bands and witch-knots, — coarse yellow hair, of the same unwholesome hue as the coat of a rusty Newfoundland.

"*Tupai Tanah*," murmured the Sultan. "The Ground-Squirrel."

"Why, this fellow," began David, "it's —"

He did not need to see, on the man's broad chest, that spreading tattoo-mark as of twin ferns drooping asunder. Amat's Red Squirrel, the face in the red cloth, the turbaned figure like a Sikh on the box of Rosario's carriage, — these had been but other guises of what now lay before him. It was the dark savage with whom David had sailed in the banca.

"A Bontoc man, too," declared Hemmes incredulously. "What 's he doing away down here?" The planter lowered his lamp close to the scowling face, and read every sign with a

practiced eye. "And the bleached hair — see! The brute's done a lot of diving somewhere, in salt water. Used to see 'em like that, down on the Northwest pearl-banks, in my old shelling days. But here — how did he get *here?*"

As the big man knit his brows over this puzzle, the updrawn knee fell toppling sidewise, in a lax movement which cast the whole leg free of shadows.

"And that!" growled the planter.

David and Rama glanced at each other, but did not speak.

The brown foot, thus exposed, was like some relic of torture, — a broad, splay thing, with the great toe wrenched over at right angles.

"*Fa-wing,*" said Hemmes, nodding as at a familiar sight. "I'd forgotten the word. *Fa-wing.* Many a slippery clay path that beggar's climbed, in the rains, to grow such an ugly claw. Has n't he, though?"

Brief silence fell.

"A sad, empty doing." The Sultan spoke to himself, in the quiet music of his own language. He drew a long breath, wearily, and let the Mataram kriss drop unregarded to the ground. "This ape-foot man assaulted bravely. And for me, Sikander of the Two Horns never made a fight so beautiful. Not a scratch on my body. And yet — " He raised his eyes mournfully.

They were red, heavy, and sated. "Yet I have no pleasure to look on this. No, none."

The burly Mr. Hemmes frowned at him shrewdly; then at David, like one who desired much information, and that right soon.

"I 'll tell you," stammered the young man weakly. Tired to the bone, aching at every joint, he shivered in the raw night air. "Come see my man, first."

On the way, they passed a gold chain shining among the scars of many footprints; but no one stooped then to pick it from the mud. They crossed — the planter shielding his lamp — toward where a second figure lay crucifixion-wise in one corner of a service-court.

"A white man?" cried Rama; and then, answering himself, — "Almost."

This body, stripped to the loin-band, gleamed as wet as the other. Except for one red bruise from cheek-bone to ear, it was of a pale yellow brown, the true half-breed color.

"Your stable parrot."

And seeing it lie there naked, David saw for the first time how Rosario's cropped head and coarse, humorous mouth were those, also, of the pale man who had steered the banca. Even now, he saw it only by hard work. Stupid: he laughed out loud, queerly and thickly.

"I hit him with my fist," he said, in a slurring

voice that he had not intended. "Could n't use your knife, old fellow. Not fair, that way. Only took my fist, and — and I hit him — and something got stuck in my arm, I think —"

He wondered why the big proprietor of Batu Blah should catch at him so roughly. It hurt his arm. Dizzy with pain and resentment, he shook the man off, only to see him set down his lamp in the mud, and take hold again with both hands.

"Help me get his coat off, Tuan Rama. By Jove, there's a mess for you! Handkerchief in his pockets? Good." Mr. Hemmes gave orders in a brisk undertone. "Right round, under the shoulder. Tight. More yet. Twist, hard. Now get him to the house."

David felt himself raised and carried like a feather. Had his legs only reached the ground, he would have balked. They ought to reach; they were infinitely long, his feet excessively light and distant. He wanted to say something.

"Slipped?" a voice grumbled. "Set him down. Twist it harder. Never mind if it smarts, my boy."

At last he could dig both heels into the mud, at the edge of the tennis-court. He struggled feebly to go back, like a dazed man dragged away from football.

"The chain, Rama," he stuttered. "The gold chain. By the lamp."

"Oh, yes," came the answer. "I'll get it. Wait a bit."

The lamp spread a forlorn radiance, like a solitary candle set on the floor of an immense hall. The Sultan ran toward it, bent over it, searched rapidly about.

"Not here," he called, in a tone of distress. "Did you take it, Mr. Hemmes? It's not here. Look!"

He straightened up, and stood pointing at the ground.

Both service-courts lay bare in the lamplight. The body of David's antagonist was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PACKET

The chill had left the morning air. A delicate vernal sunshine brightened the mountain peaks, and softened, for mile on downward mile, the green map of the plains unrolled in far perspective. It was that time of day when lizards, like bronze ornaments quickened into life, crawl out to sun themselves and catch the earliest flies.

In a veranda chair, David lay dozing. A voluminous white and blue kimono, built to cover Justus Hemmes, furnished a drapery more than ample for him, bandages and all. Not to stir, had been his orders for the day.

"I don't want to," he thought sleepily. Through his lashes, he could watch the blue mountains, ridged with sunlight, and full of crinkled shadows. This was effort enough; this, with now and then a lazy roving of the eyes, to search along the blossoming garden. At its far end, beside the graceful shaft of a lakka tree, David could follow the shining of Mary Arnot's hair, as she bent among the flowers.

"No: this is good." He shut his eyes again.

What was it, somewhere, about another girl doing that, — "herself a fairer flower"?

The only sounds, in all the wide morning, were drowsy and comfortable. A mountaineer, idling down some distant path, trailed his high, wavering song like a filament of sorrow. Coolies, who passed in the road, hailed one another musically, or groaned out a patient "All' il Allah," as they shifted a *piculan*-burden wearily, to shoulder it afresh.

This lofty garden was very peaceful. To lie there motionless, with closed eyes, and a flutter of warm breeze upon the face, gave a curiously tranquil sense of being carried on the unbreathing bosom of the mountain. And yet, while David's body rested, his mind could not sink back at ease. He lay thinking more and more of another quiet place, where, as now, he had touched the bottom of exhaustion. Pictures thronged his memory, pictures and sounds: the lighted hut in the cocoanut grove, with breakers roaring far out as they charged the reef; the messenger crawling under the floor, and his brown arm rising like a snake; the smell of hot sealing-wax, the scratching of an arrested pen, the silver locket and the cover of "Punch" that lay beside a streaming candle. All these, and more, distressed him with their new reality; but nothing so much, as to perceive how utterly his chief errand

had failed, and how, even if it had not, the outcome reared before him like a blank wall, a strait gate sealed forever. The other man might lie content, in his high chancel of palm-trees.

"Well, — in time," thought David. In time he would look back on everything aright, would think soberly and calmly of her, as of all good influences. He opened his eyes, and saw her moving about the garden. Too soon yet, he discovered; and therefore let his sight range past her to the hills. Dark, powerfully blue, and sharp of edge, but liquefied by the zigzag umbrage in ravines, they flanked the vista of the plain. Morsels of white crater-smoke hung aloft in sunshine.

"And I shall remember this place," he continued, in his musing.

A bird flicked out from a cassia clump, on his right, and darted over the garden. It left tassels of bloom swinging among the leaves. David was vacantly watching their motion, when he heard a light footstep behind the bush, over which, next moment, flew something no larger than the bird. Through a short curve, it flashed from sunlight to shade, and fell accurately into the lap of his kimono. He saw a motley turban bobbing, as some one ran off behind the screen of cassia.

"Here! Wait!" Calling aloud, David roused himself, but only to subside again, dizzy with the

attempt, the pain shooting through his arm, and the surprise.

In his lap lay the stolen packet, bundled with something else.

When his fit of giddiness had passed, he lifted the thing weakly in his free hand. A sleazy ribbon of *lufa*, already torn, gave way. The packet slid out. What remained in his fingers was a dog's-eared fold of yellow note-paper, inscribed in a schoolboy hand — "to Bowman Esqre, Batu Blah."

David opened the sheet with his teeth, and read: —

DEAR BOWMAN ESQRE, — This is no erthly, use to me I send itt back. by Gove You may laugh for itts on Your-side but, by Gove: You nevva can say I don,t no the Fare-Play wen I sea itt wen lasnight You restrane from snobbing me by purly local vernagular side-arm, my Word that was Ricohombre sportman trick You are all righto I can,t empress this betta on paper haveing no Book to consort, my poor Kulo hee is dead lasnight. he was fatheful muchacho. Kulo,s mother was any girl in the Olag but my mother subsist as english woman of sorts so my Word I no the Fare-Play wen I sea itt, I nevva touch your english man itt was Kulo did for him we sapposed he had gott the grate bally Neckles of

Pearls itt was all over the Iland that he had, and we found letter about same in shotting-jacket You took, in-clusion I would state poor Kulo was extrodiny rudimentaly and barberism, so gott perfecly scaired & did for him by Gove now I do a tapadura in the Bosque, sorry, haveing no Book to consort, sir excuse

Your sincerely well-wish

ANGEL ROSARIO.

Ps. I say itt came doosid hard not talking to You in banca then.

Ps. I say Chatra is perfecly easy frend to gentleman. she was madd You did not take a shining to her, Adios.

Ps. I keep the gold-chane.

David lowered his arm carefully, for this half-breed document set his head swimming. He shut his eyes again, and waited; then languidly groping, recovered the packet in his lap, and raised it. The manila wrapping was the same, though smeared with mud and folded all askew; the Japanese twine, bungled in hasty knots, bore only crumbs and broken scales of red wax. David let the thing fall, eased his shoulder in the chair, and lay wondering.

Some time had passed, when a cautious little tread on the veranda steps recalled him to the world.

"Did I wake you?" said Mary Arnot. "I'm so sorry."

Like a figure in a sunshine holiday, she stood holding against the whiteness of her dress a double armful of scarlet flowers. They brought out strongly that hidden blue in the depth of her eyes.

"I was awake," David answered, smiling.

She came up into the shade, and on a wicker table, where he might see them, laid down her masses of flaming color and green leaves.

"I've brought you a bit of the garden." They were blossoms of the coral-tree, the old Promethean flowers stolen by Krishna from paradise. "You may like something to look at."

"I do," was David's reply; but as he thanked her, it was not the coral-blossoms that he saw. The girl drew up a chair beyond them, so that still her eyes contained their glory of contrast.

"Will it tire you?" She motioned toward her chair. "I won't talk. Shall I tire you?"

"Never," he laughed. "Please do stay, and do talk. This is only playing invalid. Last night I got to wandering round in the dark, and fell on something sharp, and hurt one arm a little. If you stay, I can play convalescent."

Miss Arnot sat down, but for a time kept her promise. The peace of the hills enveloped them, the pleasant warmth of heightened sunlight. An

æolian humming drifted down, and spread through the air, from some village eyry where boys were flying kites. It was like a voice vibrating in the sunshine.

"How well that sound goes with everything." Her face was turned aside, yet the words, quietly spoken, admitted him to a full share in her thought and vision. "Don't you find it strange, to remember that beautiful lightning, last night, and then to see all the mountains off there, so calm? And to think they're full of everlasting fire, — founded on it, and based in it —"

Beneath, terraced along volcano-flanks, the fish-ponds — a chain of tiny square lakes crowded with palm-trees — glowed with all the airy, fervent blue of the sky. Farther down, flowing toward the green perspective lowlands, bright fields of ripened rice undulated in slow ripples, the wind revealing and hiding the reapers' hats which floated there, like blue shields of heroes rolled down by a golden Simois.

"There is the only thing that moves." The girl spoke out his own thought. The music of the kite-strings died, above, and swelled again. "The only moving thing."

She turned, to glance at him over the red flowers. Her eyebrows lifted slightly. She had seen what he held, forgotten, in his hand.

"Miss Arnot," — David already had lied for

her sake; now for his friend's, — "Tuan Rama left this with me, to give you."

She leaned across and took the packet, without replying; then sat very still, her dark blue eyes cast downward at it, in preoccupation. As though compelled to act now or not at all, she slipped the Japanese twine from the corners, and unfolded the muddy paper. David stared at the farthest rim of the plains.

"Gerald! Oh, poor boy, poor boy!"

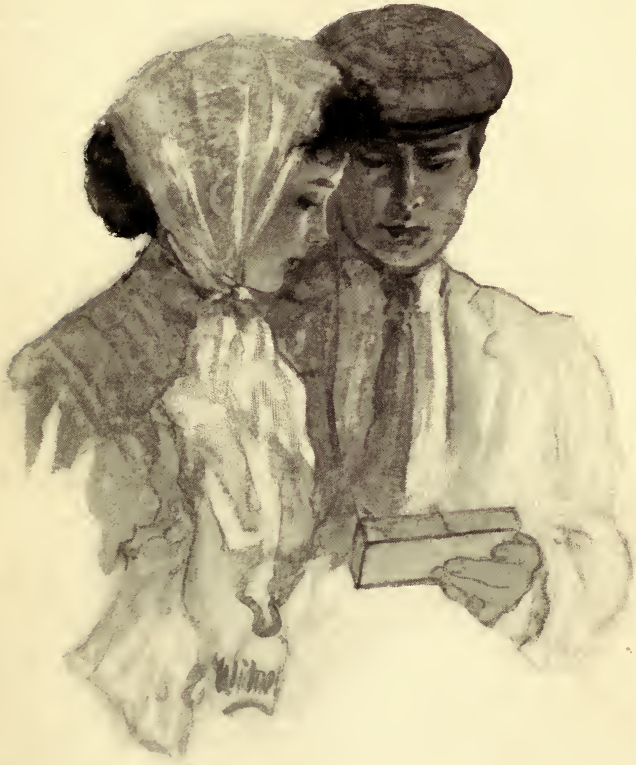
David lost his jealousy of that name. He dared not look at her until she spoke again.

"See! you were his friend. Yes, please read it."

There were no tears in her eyes, only great sadness and compassion, such as befits women who see bravely and truly into life.

David took what she replaced in his hand, — a wooden box, open, but with a slip of paper hiding the contents. Under this lay coiled a necklace of beads, small at either end of the string, large in the middle, and all as red as Krishna's flowers on the table. He glanced up, questioning.

"The old coral string I wore as a child," she answered steadily. "He never forgot. We were almost of an age, Gerald and I." Her eyes became too star-like; she averted them, to watch the golden river of rice eddying down the hills. "He never forgot. Poor Gerald! He was a very



TUAN RAMA LEFT THIS WITH ME, TO GIVE YOU

proud, unhappy, mistaken boy. If he had only told his father one half of what afterward —" She stopped, and waited. "Have you read his note? — Do, please."

At that moment, round the cassia bush came his Highness Sri Rama Vicrama, lowering, dogged, a man discredited and sullen.

"Hunted everywhere, old chap. That stable cockatoo — " He broke off, at sight of the crumpled manila paper in Miss Arnot's hand. His brown face lighted, as a fire stirs at rekindling. "Ah, you have it." Then, with a smile of grateful incomprehension, the Sultan bowed to the lady, sat down on the steps, and fastidiously arranged his skirt, plucking at the lozenges of burnt orange and brown. "I beg pardon — if I'm not in your way?"

David raised the strip of paper.

DEAR MARY, — As I came near losing your silver locket the other day, I had best return your coral beads, for the sake of old times together. Don't forget, — I was to replace every bead with a pearl. The bearer of this may be in a position to tell you how I failed.

You always stood by a worthless chap, God bless you!

Your affectionate brother,

GERALD.

The scroll dropped from the reader's hand, the sunshine went white before him.

"I — I did n't know," he stammered feebly. "Your brother. I 'm very much — I 'm very sorry. Your brother Gerald — of course, you must — "

He knew of discussion going on above him, but could not grasp the words.

"My arm hurt," he managed to explain, out of darkness. "All right now, thank you."

Daylight flooded back, slowly. He descried the Sultan Rama, smiling, smiling down as from a height, with ineffable and irritating wisdom.

"On the contrary," said a voice far off, "our patient, madam, is on a good path to recover, now."

Mary Arnot's face appeared, anxious, reproachful, beside the speaker.

"A little dizzy, that 's all." David smiled at them, and lay back, listening to the breeze that harped among the kite-strings, merrily.