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VOL. 10

APRIL, 1949

No. 4

Book-Length Novel

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Published bi-monthly by All-Fiction Field, Inc., a subsidiary of Popular Publications, Inc., at 2256 Grove Street, Chicago 16, Illinois. Editorial and Executive Offices, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Henry Steeger, President and Secretary, Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice-President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter April 24, 1946, at the Post-Office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1949, by All-Fiction Field, Inc. This issue is published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada. Copyright under International Copyright Convention and Pan American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction, in whole or in part, in any form. Single copy, 25c. Annual subscription for U.S.A., its possessions and Canada, \$1.50; other countries 38c additional. Send subscriptions to 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. For advertising rates, address Sam J. Perry, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Printed in the U.S.A.



"Such things can't be—but there she was, before our eyes!"



●
By
Elmer
Brown
Mason

BLACK BUTTERFLIES

●
The way was strewn with the dead who had dared seek out the secret of those jungle depths . . . but the lure was gold at safari's end, and the priceless wings of the sable butterfly no man had ever caught. . . .

CHAPTER I

THE MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

IT WAS the obstinacy of Trevor Dillingame, the stark, sheer obstinacy and conceit of the man in his power to handle any situation, solve any jungle secret, that brought us under the shadow.

'Tis a fault of the English. Where a Scotchman is firm, an Englishman is obstinate.

Whereas a Scotchman simply realizes

his powers, an Englishman puts no limit to what *he* may accomplish.

Not that I didn't like the man. Losh, who could help it from the mere good looks of him? though I do not put undue faith in male beauties. But he was such a whale of a laddie, six feet tall, four across the shoulders, cold blue eyes, tread as light as *plandok*, the tiny mouse-deer; and big hands, that could crack a cocoanut or hold a butterfly without bruising its wings.

Butterflies were his line, and he knew as much as anyone in the world about

them. I'm a cautious man and I'll go no further; he knew as much as anyone in the whole world about butterflies.

'Twas in the low swamp belt of the coast of British Borneo that it all began. We were collecting pretty nearly everything for a lot of stay-at-home scientists who could afford to have the jungle wonders sent to them to be tagged with Latin names at their leisure. It did pay, but it was hard work, dangerous work. The jungle leeches sucked blood from every uncovered inch of our bodies and our flesh was raw from mosquito bites. There were poisonous insects, snakes, and more snakes, and then the heat—moist, deadening; sapping your vitality like the final rounds of a long, long fight.

Shifting uneasily from foot to foot, and tearing away the jungle leeches that would pop onto their bare skins, three little Dyaks stood in the checkered shadows. Trevor Dillingame was bending over a great flower-stalk, around the top of which were symmetrically clustered the red and black caterpillars, with their one creamy segment, of *Cethosia Hypsea*, creating a living, wriggling bloom.

A red thing sailed through the air—a bird, I thought—and settled in a low nipa palm. I saw it was a tree frog at the very moment that a green-and-gold whiplike strand swung down from the tree-tops and caught it in its narrow jaws.

"*Chalaka, ular Tuan!*" (Very wicked snake, sir), shrieked one of the Dyaks.

From the olive green of a rattan thicket stepped out a woman, covered with wreaths of jasmine, the two wings of a coal-black butterfly pasted on her forehead. Her hands flew to the slender neck of the snake, twisted quickly, and the head with its red prey was left between her fingers.

Dillingame stood stock still, staring at her. Laughing up into his face, she flung away the serpent's head, stripped off a jasmine garland, cast it about his neck—and was gone.

Both Trevor and I knew enough of the mythology of Borneo to realize at once that we had looked upon a *hantus*, one of the spirits that lived on the top of Mount Kina Balu and reappeared as the female priests of the country.

That was all very well; but such things can't be—they *aren't*, whether we had seen one or not; and the woman had been very beautiful.

"Yon's a bonnie lassie who favored you with the flowers," I remarked as Dillingame began to strip off the garland.

"That I leave to your Scotch susceptibility, Andy Freeman," he answered. "But did you get a good look at those butterfly wings she wore on her forehead? An eight-inch spread to each of them, and black as jet! A new species, a new genus—perhaps even a new family of Lepidoptera. What do you suppose a specimen of that butterfly would bring in Paris or London? A fortune!"

As we talked, we picked our way carefully along the back trail toward where a boat waited us on the water of a sluggish stream that ran to the coast. We did not expect to see the Dyaks again; they had fled in wild panic, but we did hope my Chinaman would still be there and would have enough knowledge of the channel to pilot us to the sea without becoming lost in some backwater. Besides, it was getting dark, and a night in a Borneo swamp jungle is enough to make the most seasoned explorer shudder.

The boat and Chinaman were waiting, as we had hoped; but as for getting out in the darkness, Lee San positively refused to attempt to guide us. Outside of the great probability of being lost he claimed that our craft would arouse countless devils of the night by disturbing the waters.

Strange cuss, that Chinaman! He had been with me for over two years in Sumatra, Sarawak and Dutch Borneo, and never before had pretended superstition for disobeying an order. He was unusually intelligent, too, and I had given him a large share of my confidence, and gained much interesting inside native information in return. The Chinese are the traders of all that part of the world and know more about the Dyaks, Muruts and other tribes of Borneo than any white man.

We poled the boat out into midstream and dropped anchor, preparing to make the best of a bad situation. Fortunately there was enough dry wood on board to build a good fire on the dirt hearth so we could boil some water and attend to our countless leech wounds with ammonia. Of course the light lured hordes of blood-thirsty mosquitoes, but we stoked up on quinine (Lee preferred an opium pill) and smoked hard beneath our skeeter nets.

SLEEP was impossible. Even if the heat had not put it out of the question the jungle noises would have kept a dead man awake. From a hundred yards away, as regular as the striking of a clock, a bull alligator roared out his love call; *samburs*, the big blue deer of Borneo belled in the

distance; great fruit-bats cut the air with a mighty swish of their leathery wings; and underneath all came the chorus of tragedy from the forest floor, the agonized squeak of a small rodent as it was borne off in triumphant jaws, the snarl of some cat animal that had missed its spring, the ceaseless snuffle of the rooting wild hogs.

"Whisky," I said to Trevor—it's bad stuff in the tropics, but the night was unendurable—and he passed the bottle.

"Quinine," he demanded, and we both took ten more grains.

In the bow of the boat Lee San's teeth began to chatter.

"What's the matter, boy?" I sang out.

"No got mo' opium," he answered.

"Come here and drink some whisky," I ordered.

"No can," he objected—the Chinese doesn't often touch it, doesn't seem to like it—but he came down to the stern, just the same, and swallowed the big slug I had ready for him.

Silence for a long time, silence that every one of us wanted to break, but each was waiting for the other. Finally Dillingame's thoughts broke out in a torrent of words.

"Andy, how could that woman be real?—and yet you *know* she was! How did she dare grab that deadly tree-snake, that can turn and bite in its own skin, and twist off its head? And why did she do it? Where did those butterfly wings come from? You know no such insect exists in lower Borneo; you know we, or others, would have found it were it here. And if it came from the mountain country, what were its wings doing in a lowland nipa swamp on a girl's forehead? I'd give all we have collected on this trip for one specimen of that black butterfly!"

"So would I," I replied, ignoring his questions, since they were unanswerable. "But I think you are on the right track. It must be a mountain species or we would have found it. Pass the whisky."

We all had another drink. Lee did not demur this time.

"I move, unless we are down with fever in the morning, that we go back, look for the woman, and, if we find her, try to buy those wings—or at least try to discover where they came from. A black butterfly, Andy—"

"Lee savvy black butterfly," chanted the Chinaman. "You want know, you no tell!"

"Sure not," I agreed, and the Englishman grunted an affirmation.

I shan't try to repeat Lee's exact words, for the story filled the entire night; but this is the meat of what he told us. Long before the English took over North Borneo, before Sir James Brooke came to Sarawak, even before the Dutch had seized their portion of the island, the Chinese looked upon all Borneo as their own private treasure-house. From it they exported rattan, teak, precious and semi-precious stones, and gold—quantities of gold—the source of which no Aryan nation has ever been able to discover in after years. And the power, head, moving spirit of the Chinese in those days (as now) was centered in a Tong—a Tong so mighty that it had no name.

The emblem of this Tong was a portion of a butterfly wing, never a whole wing, but just a fragment; and this fragment was always round and always black. Even now the gold that came out of British Borneo passed only through the hands of the Chinese—the Chinese that belonged to the old, old Tong that had the round piece of black butterfly's wings for emblem.

The whisky passed back and forth many times during this recital, a strange one, indeed, to come from an Oriental (they never speak of their secret societies), and Dillingame, leaning toward me, whispered:

"He's lying!"

"'Tis the whisky," I whispered back.

"No lie, no whisky!" vehemently protested Lee San—his ears must have been devilish sharp. "China boy *pantong* (taboo)—mus' die in twenty day for makee Tong mad. No sendum body back to ancestors, jus' scatterum ashes. So no care what come. Tellum tluth!"

"Where do the butterfly emblems come from?" asked Trevor.

"My no savvy. Way off, mebbeso. Seem only in Blunei town."

A terrible rumpus broke out on the bank of the stream. Gruntings, howls, roars, screams. The light was just breaking, and we could dimly discern vague shapes dancing frantically about. Suddenly the sun shot over the horizon, and we saw a great python lurch into the water, leaving a crowd of big, frantically chattering, long-tailed red monkeys on the bank.

It rained dismally as we retraced our trail of the day before. The *mise en scene* was unchanged. The head of the tree-snake, already half decomposed, lay on the ground, but the red tree-frog was gone from between its jaws. The prickly thicket of rattan whence the *hantus* had come,

and into which she had disappeared, was as impenetrable as a solid wall of barbed wire.

I lifted up my voice and called. A deer snorted near by, a flight of hornbills sawed the air with their heavy wings. No other sound broke the silence save the drip, drip, drip of the wet jungle.

Morose, and hardly believing what we had seen the day before, heavy from the night's vigil, we retraced our steps to the boat and dropped down stream.

BRUNEI is built on piles and roofed with thatch, and has all of twenty thousand inhabitants. A globe-trotter once called it "the Venice of the East." There is an English quarter, of course, with a resident who lives in card indexes and considers it low to have anything to do with the natives.

We were not of his favorites. He told us on one occasion that our lack of dignity in mingling with the aborigines lowered the caste of every white man in the East. Dillingame promptly chucked him into the water, and he retaliated by revoking all our collecting permits. It was a nuisance to have to forge others; and then, too, we spelled his name wrong on them. The first real government white man we met in the interior laughed at us, corrected the spelling and passed us on.

It was humiliating, though.

In the Chinese quarter, where all the business was done, they knew us well and, as near as you can gage the feelings of Orientals, liked us. We shipped all our stuff through them, and they cashed our drafts and even lent us money.

Among the Kadyans and Dyaks, in the native quarter, we were rather lords. Dillingame crumpled up all their wrestlers and astounded them with feats of strength. I told them stories in the different vernaculars.

There is absolutely no use in a white man trying to match wits with a yellow one if he wants to find out anything. I went straight to the biggest Chinaman of the lot, told him where and how we had seen the black butterfly wings, and asked him point-blank whence they came. He answered me with apparent frankness that he did not believe such an insect existed today, though it may have in the past. Goods (he did not specify what kind) that came from the mountainous country around Kina Balu often were accompanied by a fetish in the form of a black butterfly's wing, but that wing was

made of paper—and to prove it, he gave me one.

This, to my mind, closed the incident.

Dillingame, who had been getting together supplies and packing our stuff for shipment, greeted me cheerfully.

"Hello, dead man," he called, "I have just been informed that anyone who sees a *hantus* is due to cash in the same quarter of the moon. One of our Dyaks ran amuck when the three got back, and was hacked to pieces by his friends; the other two have been gloriously full of arrack ever since. What did you find out about the butterfly?"

I repeated what the Chinaman had told me, taking out the paper wing and laying it before him.

I think I said before that Englishmen are obstinate. Trevor Dillingame absolutely refused to believe a word of it. He pointed out that the paper wing showed an arrangement of veins and a frenulum quite different from that of any known species of butterfly, and stoutly maintained that such a species did exist and the paper counterpart was just a typical oriental plot to throw us off. I tried to show him that there could be no reason why the Chinese would object to us sashaying all over the island after butterflies, since we always attended strictly to our own business; but he wasn't to be budged from his plot theory.

"I'm going to have that butterfly if I rake over all the mountains in Borneo," he announced, "and I'll bet you I will have it within a year—or rather that we will; because you are naturally coming along."

"You mean you *may* get it, not *will* get it," I corrected.

"I mean I *shall* get it," he insisted. And yet people say the Scotch don't understand the difference between shall and will!

* * *

Brunei is civilized in that it has one white hell where foregather the captains and mates of the trading ships, globe-trotters and men who have made their pile in the black country; in short, every white who has the price. You pay your money and you get what you order. To a certain point you do as you please. Beyond that point a Malay kriss ends the evening's entertainment and the tide takes you out to sea without trouble to your friends.

A Chinaman ran the place, of course. He called it the House of Unending Happiness and Delight. White men called it the Devil's Club.

Neither Dillingame nor I is a saint. We like our bit of fun as well as anyone. 'Twas to the Devil's Club we planned to go that evening; first to talk to one of Rothschild's orchid-collecting agents then to enjoy whatever happened along. We didn't anticipate much from the agent. He was an evil little rat of a Portuguese who bought low and, in all probability, turned in his purchases at four times what they cost him. Also he was a careful lad with the money, never known to buy a drink could he help it.

Lee San had laid out clean white clothes for us in our nipa-thatched hut, and seemed to be lingering about with something on his mind that he lacked the courage to unload. I gave him a lead, and, explaining that only nineteen days more of existence remained to him according to the sentence of the Tong, he asked for his pay covering the full period.

It's fatal to pay a Chinaman in advance, so I naturally refused and suggested, as a substitute, that he come with us into the interior, thus probably running away from his fate.

The idea of escape had evidently never occurred to him—Tongs even do their thinking for most Chinamen—and I left him to turn it over in his mind.

The entertainment furnished at the Devil's Club is rather unique. Everything starts with a good dinner, of course, and plenty of drinks. Then comes gambling on a rickety roulette wheel; fan tan, or just drinking. If none of these amusements appeals to you, you watch the show. Dyak girls, teeth blackened and ornamented with tiny gold stars let into the enamel, ears bored around the edges with holes from which dangle rings and pendants, wave their long hands, the nails dyed to a crimson, and dance to the slow beat of the native instruments. Chinese girls, always smiling out of their slanting eyes, play toy-like banjos and never cease to wonder at European kisses. Perhaps there are wrestlers, or two sailors from rival ships put on the gloves and fight to a knockout while men from every corner of the earth stand around the ring.

These various kinds of evenings, with their next mornings' headaches, were old stories to us; but this evening furnished something surprisingly new. Gomez, the Portuguese, not only invited us to dinner, but actually paid for it. Then, instead of going into the back room to smoke opium, he sat out with us watching the dancing and talking about everything under the

sun. 'Twas plain that the lad wanted something from us, but to save me I couldn't figure out what it was.

Finally, as the crowd thinned out, dropping into or being carried to their boats, he suggested that he accompany us to our own hut, as he had something of importance to take up with us.

Lee San set out the whisky, and as soon as he withdrew, the Portuguese hauled a little package out of his inside pocket.

"Can't handle this alone," he remarked as he began to remove the paper wrapping, "but there should be enough in it for all three of us," and he laid a porcupine quill and a small round object, about the size of a half crown, on the table.

I picked up the transparent quill. The weight together with the color of the contents told me at once that it was filled with gold. Dillingame gave a low whistle over the round article and handed it to me. It was a kind of a locket, holding beneath its thin film of glass a round section cut from the wing of a black butterfly.

"Where did you get these, Gomez?" I demanded.

"What does it matter as long as I know where the gold came from, and we can get more?"

"It matters so much that if you want us in with you, you'll have to tell us."

"I found them on the body of a Murut who had been bitten by a snake," he answered sulkily. "He told me, before he died, that he brought gold down from the mountains each year, that there was plenty of it there."

We hadn't the slightest desire to take Gomez with us, but other considerations besides our personal feelings had to enter into the calculations. It costs like blazes to get to the back country; mainly because one has to carry all the rice for the porters, as well as everything else, and the Portuguese seemed to have lots of cash. Of course we realized the source of at least part of this wealth. Not for a moment did we believe that a single quill of gold was all that had been taken from the dead Murut, any more than we swallowed the story about the poor devil having been bitten by a snake. Gomez had no reputation save that of an excellent shot and being death quick with a knife.

We insisted on one reservation, namely, that all entomological specimens should be our exclusive property—oddly enough it was the black butterfly that appealed to Dillingame's and my imagination even more than the prospect of gold; and then

went into the project, each taking a third.

IT'S devilish hard getting into the interior, but it can be done by determined men who know the jungle. A couple of weeks later found us under the shadow of Kina Balu, its fourteen thousand foot summit towering high above us. The natives had not bothered us at all; indeed, we hadn't seen much of them, and our supplies were holding out splendidly.

All that day we tolled up the old course of the Tarnpassuk, collecting as we went, and we certainly did well. Everywhere were beautiful green papilos—the Saranak Beauty—and frail, black-spotted *Hestidae*, while lovely, velvety black-and-green male *brookceni* went swiftly dancing by. Also the orchids were something unbelievable; *grammatophyllums*, golden-brown spotted flowers on stout two-yard-long spikes; a greenish-yellow flowered *dendrobium*; clusters of tubular *aesclynanthus* like scarlet jewels beneath the great, leathery, aroid leaves; and the enormous moth orchids with their hundred snowy flowers.

Already we could easily see a profit on the trip from what we had gathered if we continued to do even half as well, and were all as happy as crickets.

That evening we camped on the bank of a half-dry stream, and while Dillingame and I figured out how much further we could cut down the loads for the mountain climb, Gomez washed the sands for gold—his favorite amusement, no matter where we stopped. Lee San (he had accepted my suggestion to accompany us in defiance of his Tong) was cooking our supper, and the jungle was as quiet as a high-limit poker game.

Night came quickly, as it does in the East; a black curtain rolled suddenly across the sky through which the stars would later punch their twinkling holes, and we gathered around the fire. From far off in the jungle came the bellowing of wild cattle, a flying lemur cut a straight line against the horizon across the curves of the circling bats.

Then, in the Ida'an tongue, and with the sudden crash of an orchestra, came a roaring chorus:

"Little red flames that flit so fast,
Through wet, green leaves till day is past—
Little red flames in the tree-tops shine
Where the hungry, green-gold serpents twine—

"One and all, great and small,
We carry you up the mountain tall,
Down where the jungle's hot and dim,
Under the world's far, farthest rim,

To HER, to HER
Where red waters stir,
And the lilies float
O'er the gods demure."

Weapons ready, we stepped out of the circle of the fire and stood in the shadowy edge of the jungle. The moon swept up over the tree-tops and down its silvery path filed a long procession. They were Ida'ans from the mountains, the taint of them on the breeze, and each of the fifty men was loaded down with a wicker basket whence came a volume of sound like the splashing of countless, tiny waterfalls.

Again crashed out the song:

"Little red flames that feel as cool
To burning hands as the shaded pool—
Little red flames through the jungle fling
The breath of freshness while you sing—

"One and all, great and small,
Never cease your piping call,
Down where the jungle's hot and dim,
Under the world's far, farthest rim,
While you go to HER
Where the red waters stir
And the lilies float
O'er the gods demure."

"They are going to, not coming from, the mountains," whispered Gomez, "so they haven't any gold. Let's stay hidden."

"Want to know what is in those baskets. They'd see our fires anyway," spoke up Dillingame, and stepped out of the shadow toward the last of the passing men.

It was an idiotic thing to do—I don't believe in hunting trouble—but I followed him, of course. The entire column halted. It was probably the first white man they had ever seen; certainly the first wearing khaki, puttees and an immaculate helmet, and I called for the *orang-kaya* (head man).

A little wizened Chinaman was pushed forward, whom I proceeded to interrogate sternly on the purpose of the expedition just as though I were a government officer.

I got away with it, of course. They were returning from a religious pilgrimage into the lowlands after having washed away their sins in some sacred stream. I said I got away with it, but not with bells on. Indeed, the Chinaman seemed somewhat inclined to interrogate me as to our destination and purpose in that part of the country, a tendency that I promptly suppressed. I also gave him orders to camp well away from our party and not to permit his men to stray in our direction.

During this conversation the fresh sound as though of running water continued to

come from the baskets the natives were carrying. Trevor stepped to the nearest one and threw up the lid. It was loosely packed full of green leaves, among which sang hundreds of little red tree frogs.

BACK in camp I cursed the Englishman proper for advertising our presence to the natives, and we speculated in regard to the red tree frogs. I knew the Ida'ans considered rats a table delicacy, and the frogs might be in the same category. The strange part was that an expedition should penetrate into the lowlands to collect them—they aren't found far from the coast—and that the expedition should be in charge of a Chinaman.

After all, it did not concern us directly, and gradually, one by one, we dropped off beneath our mosquito nets. The jungle noises blurred from separate sounds into a droning whole, I was drowsily conscious of a pair of large, bright, yellow eyes—a slow loris my brain lethargically telegraphed—and I slept.

I woke, with the first morning light, to the song of birds. The sun popped up over the horizon, and the chorus from the tree-tops increased to an ecstasy of harmony. In prompt contrast to all this joyousness came a wall of fright from behind our tents, followed by shouts of surprise and fear from the porters.

Jumping into my boots, clad only in pajamas, and an automatic in my hand, I rushed toward the sound of the disturbance. Lee San, surrounded by the Muruts, was raising his voice to high heaven and holding his upper garment away from his body—and from that upper garment fluttered a long piece of paper covered with Chinese characters and signed with a crudely inked butterfly's wing.

"Stop that fool howling," I yelled angrily, tearing away the fluttering strip that was evidently the cause of his anguish, "and tell me what this all means!"

"Lee San on'y t'lee day to live! That Tong sign. No can get 'way!" and he roared anew.

Grabbing him by the throat I choked the noise back into his gullet.

"Where did that laundry ticket come from?" I demanded.

"Pin to clo' when Lee sleep," he moaned.

I was sorry for the little Chinaman, of course; but couldn't let him go on bawling forever. It might stampede my dozen porters any minute. Naturally I surmised that one of them was in Tong employ, and had pinned Lee's sentence to him while he

slept. I should have liked mightily to ferret out the guilty one, but didn't dare take the risk of the bunch quitting on me.

Pretending a wrath I was far from feeling and threatening Lee San with immediate death, I sent the men to cooking their breakfasts and then returned to my tent.

We made good progress the next two days, passing several Ida'an villages, the inhabitants of which viewed us with an uninterested stolidity that made me rather nervous, and on the second night camped just below the timber line of Kina Balu.

Gomez claimed that gold came from the western slope, but it was easier to go over the mountain than to try to thread the impenetrable jungle around its base.

We took many rare butterflies, those days, including the *Euthalia magnolia*, known only from Kina Balu; another beautiful local species with a six-inch spread of velvety blackness and a broad band of pea-green across the wings; and then, just before pitching camp, I netted an entirely new species, soft gray with little squares, as though of isinglass, set in its wings, and both veination and frenulum identical with the round fragment of black wing that Gomez had shown us in the little locket.

We had out this talisman and compared the two—after which I slipped the little round thing into my pocket—and it was easy to see that we had a species for an entirely new genus; two species, if we secured the black butterfly. In spite of the rain that began to fall that night Dillingame and I were jubilant, though we could not get Gomez to enthuse—he was after more valuable game.

The altitude and cold rid us of mosquitoes and we turned in early in anticipation of a full night's sleep. Scarcely had I closed my eyes, however, when I was wide awake again and sitting up. Clear as a bell, through the darkness, came the whistle of a kite—and kites don't fly at night—to be answered from the other side of the camp by the drawling snarl of a tiger cat, followed by the unmistakable sound of a girl's laugh.

On my feet in a flash, I stole out beyond the light of the fire and lay down in the shadow, straining my eyes through the blackness. It had stopped raining and not even an insect disturbed the perfect stillness. Suddenly, to my right, a single voice broke into song—a voice so filled with contemptuous raillery that it made me grit my teeth in anger.

"*Orang, puteh,** what dost seek
Toward Kina Balu's lofty peak
Where the dead troop free
'Neath Lugundi's tree
In the sacred lake
Whence the spirits flee? . . ."

I raised up on my left elbow and fired twice in the direction of the sound. A mocking laugh came back to me, then silence, save for the waking of the camp. Quieting the men, I told Dillingame and Gomez not to bother me with questions that night, and, turning in, slept till daylight.

CHAPTER II

THE TALISMAN

IT was deadly cold in the morning and Lee's teeth chattered as he built our fire. I sent him over to wake the porters, only to have him back in a second, hands trembling and face ashy white.

"Come," was all he could say. "Come!"

My twelve porters lay their feet to the dead embers, and on each man's left cheek was stamped in black a butterfly's wing.

There was no holding them, of course, when they awoke and saw the mysterious emblem that had been placed on their very flesh while they slept. Furthermore the marks would not wash off—left an indelible stain that seemed to penetrate the pores of the skin. I threatened, bribed, cajoled, all in vain; and, accepting half what I had promised them for wages, my Muruts fled down the mountain.

Nice fix we were in! All our goods and chattels dumped high on the side of Kina Balu, and no one to carry them! There was only one thing to do: go back to the nearest Ida'an village and hire local carriers—and a villainous lot they proved to be when I finally managed to get ten of them at an exorbitant wage in cloth. Then it was noon before we got started again, and our nerves were on razor edge.

Lee San helped the situation by bewailing the fact that it was the last day on earth allotted to him by the Tong, and stuck so close to me that I finally lost my temper and made him lead the column.

Over the shoulder of Kina Balu the character of the country changed. Jungle grew high up a mountain slope so precipitous that we never should have been able to descend had it not been for a narrow, winding trail. There were no butterflies, the giant trees meeting overhead and

*Stranger in our midst.

shutting out the light, but never have I seen such a riot of orchids, or so many gorgeously colored birds.

My porters balked twice, demanding their wages as having gone far enough; and the second time I was forced to make good my threatenings by knocking one flat. It was beastly hot and sticky, the ground fairly crawled with leeches, and the trail was cut every hundred yards by wild pig runs, along which we three times went astray.

I joined Lee San and we kept well ahead of the column, progressing downward as best we could and clearing the way. The Chinaman had recovered his spirits with the realization that sundown would see the end of his fears—Tong law considers a man dead, no matter whether he is or not, after the date for his execution has passed, and no longer molests him.

The trail became narrower and narrower. I stepped over a liana that stretched across about a foot from the ground, and turned as Lee brought down his jungle knife to sever it. There was a swish overhead and a weighted spear plunged down, entering the man's neck, piercing the length of his body through the thigh, its point going into the ground and holding him upright.

Lee San opened his mouth in an attempt to speak, his head flopped forward, and death claimed him before the words could come.

Dazed for the moment, I stood motionless, my eyes on the spear shaft along which slowly dribbled round drops of blood. A ray of sunlight filtered down from above and played over the dead man. Sable black, two feet from wing tip to wing tip, an enormous butterfly darted straight for the crimsoning spear, poising against it with swiftly fanning wings.

I grabbed with my bare hand, but it dodged, circling about my wrist, to re-light on the dead man's bleeding shoulder. Again I lunged for it.

There was a rustle behind me and an arm went around my neck, flinging me flat on the trail. Beautiful as an orchid in her wreaths of fragrant jasmine, a woman caught the sable butterfly between her fingers, jumped lightly over my body, and disappeared into the jungle, while through the great tree trunks came a low, mocking laugh.

Half stunned, I stumbled to my feet, tearing away a great leech that had fastened to my lip, and the first of the porters came down the trail.

It was a trap for wild hogs that Lee San had blundered into, and I sprang two more of them, with a long pole cut for the purpose, within the next mile.

We buried the Chinaman beside the trail—tropical jungles do not admit of delay in such matters—and I certainly did feel cast down over the loss of such a good cook. Also he had been with me over two years and I was very well used to him.

I did not mention the sable butterfly or the woman before Gomez, saving up the incident for Dillingame alone. Perhaps this was because of the rather humiliating rôle I had played. Anyway, I did not say anything about it at the time to either of them.

Two miles farther down the trail the jungle opened up into a park of enormous teak trees with no underbrush on the forest floor; just a meadow of short grass with a stream running through the middle, on the bank of which we camped. Being completely devoid of confidence in the porters, I had all the waterproof-canvas-wrapped loads piled in a great heap, pitched the two tents, one on each side, and then the three of us matched to see who should cook. Gomez got stuck, much to his disgust; so he had to forego his customary evening's amusement of washing for gold.

Hardly had we finished our supper, and a rotten bad meal it was, when the Ida'ans appeared and asked pay for the full week I had hired them with an additional bonus to the one I had manhandled. As is always the case with natives, and inspired by arrack, they started at the top of the pitch beginning with demands and working down until they reached the pleading stage.

Their argument was based on the fact that we had not climbed Kina Balu as they expected, and as had other white men, but had led them down into the Land of Blood where the spirits stole men's souls. Their spokesman assured me that no one who went into this jungle ever came back, that it was the abode of spirits and devils who, like gigantic leeches, fed on the blood of the living.

In the end I drove them to their fire, and we turned in, agreeing to keep watch, turn by turn, during the night. Dillingame took the first period and I went promptly to sleep.

Then I began to dream. The *hantus* woman stepped out of a rattan thicket and laughed up into Trevor's face. He gathered her into his arms and bent his

lips to hers, when a flock of great, black butterflies swept down, forming a cloud about them. I beat at them with my hands to reach the voice calling, "Andy! Andy!"

Someone was shaking me by the shoulder. "Wake up, for God's sake, Andy, wake up!" whispered Dillingame. "This place is enchanted!"

OUTSIDE the tent, it was light as day. A luminous mass came hurtling through the air and fell at my feet. I kicked it and a great fungus broke into a thousand pieces, each glowing with fox fire. More fungi were hurled into the open space about the camp. I rolled down several of the canvas-covered loads and we crouched behind them. The Ida'ans, near the dead fire, were standing huddled in a close group whence came no sound.

The shower of luminous fungi ceased. There was a pop like a champagne cork leaving the bottle and one of the porters staggered and fell on his face, a tiny arrow quivering in his forehead.

"Lie down, you fools!" I yelled, and pumped a bullet into the edge of the jungle. A shower of tiny arrows rattled among the packs. I picked up one and showed its point, smeared with some pitchy poison, to Trevor.

"No use staying here to be shot down like trapped hogs," he snapped. "Let's make a break for cover. Where is Gomez?"

"Here," came the little man's voice from my elbow. "We're in a tight fix, is it not?"

"We're in all of that," I answered. "Draw their fire, and after the shower of arrows, grab a pack and get into the jungle near them. I'll toss one of those flares we brought for trading where they seem thickest and we'll try to get enough to give them a permanent scare."

One of the Ida'ans rose cautiously to his knees. Came the pop of a blow gun and he went down screaming, his hands to his face. Trevor fired in the general direction whence the arrow came. A storm of the little darts rattled about us, and then we were all running, packs held before us, toward the edge of the jungle.

Safe in its shadow, I touched a match to the flare and flung it whence had come the last volley. There was a yell of fear, and we turned loose a bunch of black outlined figures, long bamboo blow-guns in their hands. Some went down, but about twenty started across the open.

"After them, and get as many as you can," I shouted. "We've got to make this a lesson!"

Under the cover of the trees we ran, shooting as we went, until they crossed the stream and were lost in the blackness beyond.

Something stirred behind us, and Trevor jumped into the underbrush. There was a brief struggle, and then he swore.

"Gimme a light," he demanded. "I've got something queer."

I struck a taper match and held it above my head. Dillingame had two slender wrists grasped in one of his big hands, and as the flame flared higher, my eyes followed his other hand to where it was twisted in a woman's hair—the woman of the nipa swamp, snake and red tree frog, the woman who had snatched the sable butterfly from Lee San's bleeding shoulder!

Gomez switched on an electric torch and we all stood staring at her. Man, but she was beautiful! Short grass skirt, leather sandals bound halfway up her legs, the upper part of her body bare save for wreaths of jasmine. Her skin was as white as the flowers of the great moth-orchid, her lips crimson as red blood, her eyes blazing violet, swimming with flecks of gold, and her hair beneath Trevor's hand was black and soft as silken thread.

Losh, but she was beautiful as she stared back at us, her little hands twisting helplessly in the Englishman's big one, her body tensed.

Then, before we could find words, her form relaxed, her eyes flew to Trevor's face and she laughed up at him. Not a wild, hysterical laugh, just a soft, amused little one with an undercurrent of contempt in it—the sound a woman makes over a child who has done some silly thing.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Gomez cross himself and shift forward his automatic.

"Laugh, you vixen," said Dillingame, but his eyes were not unkind. "She jabbed a knife into me and fought like a wild cat," he flung us in an aside, then turning back to her, "Do you know I ought to kill you, shoot you down in your tracks?"

Of course the woman did not understand, and again she laughed up at him, her lips curving back over her white teeth, her violet golden eyes half shut.

"*Santa Maria!*" gasped Gomez. "Let me shoot her and then we'll burn her body in the fire. Don't you see she is a *hantus*, a witch? She will enchant us all and the leeches will suck our bodies dry. I am afraid—me!"

"Don't be a fool," I advised gruffly, step-

ping in front of him, for he was fingering his pistol nervously. "Bring your captive lassie to the tents, Trevor. I'm thinking we won't be troubled with those poisoned darts while she is with us. Gomez, go over and tell the porters to keep down on the ground. If there is one of those blow-gun men simply wounded, haul him in and we'll see what we can get out of him."

It had begun to drizzle. I threw wood on the fire and piled the packs in a barricade, the tents for ends. Meanwhile Trevor tied the woman's wrists together, holding the end of the rope in his own hands; nor did she resist. Gomez came back driving a small figure before him and, as it came into the firelight, I nearly yelled.

It wasn't a man, it was a beast, a human ape! There was a *sarong* around its middle but the rest of the body was naked and evenly covered with a generous growth of reddish hair, arms ending in tiny hands hung below its knees, and its head jerked from side to side with the lightning quickness of an animal while it whimpered over a wounded thigh where a bullet had creased the black skin.

The only human thing about it was its hair, which was elaborately dressed high on the head and through which were stuck several of the tiny poisoned arrows.

Suddenly it caught sight of the woman, and going down in a cringing heap, lay motionless, its face against the ground.

"Five dead," reported Gomez laconically, and took his seat as far as possible from the Englishman and his captive.

I addressed the girl in the *Ida'an* tongue.

"Why did you lead your slaves to kill us? Have we done you harm?"

"You come for gold as do all strangers—our gold is pledged. About that I should not care, but you take the souls of the dead, the butterflies. Not even do you respect the souls of the sacred priests that sail on sable wings!"

"Who are you that talk of souls!"

"Kratas, priestess of the Land of Blood, who knows not death, who lives forever."

"Yon lassie is wrong in her head," I said to Dillingame in English. "Let's try and find out something from the beast-man," and I heaved him to his feet.

What came next happened quicker than word can tell it. Raising her hands to her lips the woman severed the cords that bound her wrists with one snap of her white teeth. Trevor caught her around the shoulders and, whirling, she bit deep into his hand.

"You'll pay for that, my girl," he snarled, gathered her into his arms, bent, and kissed her lips. One second she relaxed, clung to him, then twisted free, caught a tiny poisoned arrow from the savage's hair, drew the point in a long scratch across his back, and leaped over the packs. Trevor sprang after her just in time to slap Gomez's automatic from his hand as he fired.

A taunting laugh floated back out of the darkness.

The beast-man died from the poisoned scratch, toward morning, with many twistings and writhings. With the first light our *Ida'ans* disappeared up the trail and we could not catch them. They left three dead behind, victims of the poisoned arrows, and we found six beast-men in the jungle and five in the open that had stopped our bullets.

It took some time to dig a pit large enough for all those bodies, and, after we had stamped down the dirt, we sat on the packs and looked dismally at one another.

Gomez broke the silence. "Money I like it much, but if I am dead or crazy it does me no good. Let us go back as quickly as we can with what provisions our shoulders will carry."

"That's all very well for you," spoke up Dillingame, "you have a stake tucked away. Freeman and I have our all in this venture. I move we linger on and try to pick up something else. What do you say, Andy?"

"There is food for a long time," I answered judiciously, "and we are more liable to be attacked on the back trail running away than if we stay boldly here. I'll not say it were best to go on, nor will I say it were best to stay, but—"

I broke off, and dived for my net. A gray butterfly of the new genus was floating just outside the barrier of packs. I caught it in midair. Then I chased another, and another till, with eleven perfect and four damaged specimens, I finally returned to the tents. Dillingame had the real luck, though. He brought in forty of them, all taken over a crimson orchid, and netted an immense *Hestia* besides.

As we removed our catch from the cyanide bottles and folded them, wings back to back, into envelopes before packing them away in our waterproof collecting boxes, we easily calculated with what we already had we'd break better than square on the expedition.

Gomez was not there when we returned,

but he drifted in with his gold washing pan shortly afterward, and an *I-have-eaten-the-canary* expression on his face.

"You found it!" I guessed at once, and could see his under lip stiffen for a lie.

"I have found traces," he answered; "it may be here, though probably in very small quantities. Anyway, I'm brave enough to stay on a little while even if you gentlemen are not."

Dillingame's face went purple, but I spoke before he could explode.

"Sure, we'll stay on. After Trevor and I have done a little more collecting we'll all turn in and pan the stream, and if there is gold we'll find it. Meanwhile let's match to see who cooks today!" And there the matter rested.

I'M A cautious man—being Scotch—and I haven't been every place in the world, so I'll not say there are not collecting grounds equal to where we were, but under oath I'll swear these were the best I had ever seen.

We found no further new species of the larger butterflies, but the *microlepidoptera* would have kept a systematist busy classifying them for an entire year. The unnamed orchids were legion, and we took skins of two new pheasants, not to mention the *Argus*, *Bullwer* and *Fireback* ones; a rare yellow shrike, gorgeous red and yellow sunbirds, and a cream-white lemur. All day we were off in the jungle so interested in our own work that we paid little attention to Gomez.

Gradually it dawned on us that the Portuguese had developed a virulent grouch, wasn't even civil, and one morning when it was raining torrents, so it was impossible to leave the tents, matters came to a head. It all began by Dillingame detailing our harvest of butterflies, orchids and birds for his benefit, a cataloguing which he terminated by the statement that the next day we would join in the gold search.

Gomez promptly answered with a snarl that he'd attend to his business and it would be healthier for us to keep to ours, that we needn't be afraid he wouldn't make a fair division—even though we had lured him on the trip under false pretenses and made him do all the work. And then, without the slightest warning, he jerked out his gun and barely missed the Englishman. Furious, Dillingame made a jump for him. The Portuguese fired again just as I hauled the tent pole down so the two of them were wrapped in its folds. From the outside I gathered the little man into

a neat bundle of canvas. Trevor crawled from beneath, and we undid Gomez with a gun pressed to his stomach, and then tied him hand and foot.

There was no doubt he had intended to kill both of us, and he expected no gentler fate at our hands, especially after we had searched him and found fully a pound of dust in a belt strapped around his waist. There was nothing of the hero about him, and he began to whine for his life, offering the bribe of showing us the exact place he had found the gold.

I'll not deny that the Anglo-Saxon is the greatest of all races, but being one has its disadvantages at times—we talk when we should act. To save a cartridge Gomez should have had a knife stuck into him, and a savage would have applied that practical solution to his problem. White men are civilized beyond logic, however.

I sat down by the trussed-up, treacherous little rat and explained to him carefully that if he appeared at Brunei without us there would be no possibility of any explanation he might offer getting over, that he would have a mighty short time to enjoy his gold before some of our friends got him. Then we turned him loose.

Trevor kicked him once, and, according to the custom of fool Anglo-Saxons, after that we acted as though nothing had happened.

Our combined search for gold was without result. Gomez had taken his from a single pot-hole in the bottom of the creek—he showed us where. There were traces everywhere, but no place worth a second panning. The formation was unusual, the water flowing over a thin bed of sand beneath which was solid rock. The creek itself sprang from a swamp, half a mile up the mountainside, and for the two miles we followed it down, ran between high banks on which grew short grass and mighty teak or cocoanut trees exactly like the place where we were camped.

Since the immediate neighborhood had been thoroughly raked over both for specimens and gold, it seemed best to move on, and the banks of the stream offered open going without the trail danger of being ambushed or speared in a pig trap. We cached nearly everything, including the orchids and bird and animal skins, swinging them high in air by ropes over the limbs of the immense trees, and with our butterflies (which took up little bulk), ammunition, some food, and a small pack of trading stuff, the three of us started down stream.

For three miles the character of the country did not change, and then there was an abrupt dip. The stream broke into rapids and went brawling downwards, both grass and trees disappeared from the banks, their places being taken by immense boulders, stretches of bare rock and sandy beach. Half a mile from the stream, on either side, rose the barrier of the jungle, and it was dry, broiling hot.

We progressed along the sandy beach until well into the afternoon, stopping every now and then to pan the edges of the stream, but getting no color. Before us rose a cloud of vapor that I took at first for smoke and then decided must be mist above some great waterfall.

We camped early. Wood had to be brought from the jungle half a mile away, but the ground was smooth, so we dragged an entire dead tree to the beach without much difficulty. A cool—too cool—wind sprang up at dusk, driving away the mosquitoes, and by the time it was dark we were grateful indeed for the fire.

I suppose it may seem queer to anyone who has not felt the spell of the unexplored wilderness that we should go on and on facing known as well as unknown dangers. Really it was the perfectly logical and natural thing, considering the men we were. Gomez was spurred on by his insatiable lust for gold. Dillingame and I told one another that we must have that sable butterfly; but the real reason lay in that lure, irresistible to men of our race, that Kipling so well expresses:

Something yet beyond the ranges,
Diddle, diddle, diddle come,
Something calling, something calling,
Diddle, diddle, diddle dum.

I don't remember the exact words.

AFTER supper we sat around sleepily watching the bats swoop through the flames and listening to the roar of life from the jungle. A great beetle blundered into the fire and toppled over to the ground at our feet. Dillingame and I bent over it. There was a gasp from Gomez that made us look up.

Sitting on a boulder within the circle of the firelight was Kratas, the priestess; two sable butterfly wings on her forehead; neck and bosom wreathed with jasmine, and an oblong, palmleaf-wrapped bundle between her small hands.

"Welcome, priestess of the *orang utan* (wild men)," I said, shifting my automatic



The creature looked like the devil disguised in the form of a dragon.

well forward under my fingers. "Many times welcome, wearer of the sable wings."

She did not answer me, just sat motionless, her fearless eyes, filled with curiosity, resting on each of us in turn. Gomez shifted uneasily in his seat, Trevor picked up the floundering beetle and held it between his long nervous fingers, I slipped the strap from the trading pack.

"Do you, then, love to play 'neath the shadow of death that ye linger here, or have ye eaten of the blue root of madness?" she asked.

"Death dare not approach us," I boasted.

She seemed to accept my words as a mere statement of fact.

"And yet there was blood beneath my teeth when they sank into his white flesh," she mused, looking at Dillingame. "My lips were salty with it till his lips ravaged the taste from mine." Then, abruptly changing her tone, "I bring ye the gift that all white men crave," and she tossed the compact palmleaf bundle at my feet. "Let it be *salaamat jalan* (good-by). I bid ye go whence ye came before three suns."

"Tell her we haven't the slightest intention of leaving until we take some of those black butterflies," broke in Trevor obstinately.

"I'll tell her no such thing," was my answer, but the woman had gathered some of the meaning from the tone of his voice.

"Let him remain if he desires it more than life," she said softly, and, gliding to the Englishman, held her lips up to his.

"We, too, offer gifts," I hastened, to attract her attention, tumbling an alarm clock, gross of earrings and bolt of pink calico out of the pack, but she did not even glance at them. Drawing her lips back from his, she laughed up into Trevor's face, and was gone into the night.

"Andy, I don't believe any man but me has ever kissed that woman," he sighed.

"Holy smoke! And who cares if a hundred had?" I demanded.

Gomez tore open the palmleaf bundle and its contents slipped to the ground—twenty hollow porcupine quills filled with gold.

"Fools we were not to keep her once we had her," he cried, gathering up the hollow tubes, avariciously. "There are probably quantities where this came from. A cord around her temples or a little fire. . . . What's that for?" he howled, as Dillingame's boot caught him in the side.

In the morning, we started down stream toward the vapor that hung in the sky.

I listened for the crash of falling water as we approached, but there was no greater sound than the murmur of the stream. After a mile the stream itself switched abruptly to the left while the vapor cloud rose dead ahead and close to the edge of the jungle. We were walking on solid rock that dipped in a series of remarkably symmetrical, spaced steps, so it was like going down a very shallow pyramid.

Nearer, the vapor took definite form, one thick jet going straight up into the air, and touching each side of this central column were two misty, broad, rounded clouds.

"*Santa Maria!*" gasped Gomez. "It looks like one of your cursed butterflies!"

And so it did, the body clearly defined and the wings spread out and moving in the slight breeze.

A hundred yards further on we halted in amazement. At our feet a narrow flight of stone stairs ran down into a valley, or rather an enormous amphitheatre, since it was plainly the work of man. Half a mile broad and three-quarters of a mile long, it was sunk fifty feet deep in the solid rock. Immediately below us three springs boiled up about a central tank, springs of hot water, judging from the steam that rose and traced the butterfly in the sky. The floor was bare rock, save on the opposite side where a belt of jungle had gained a foot-hold and flourished luxuriantly.

At the end of the amphitheatre, to the left, a hundred-yard flight of easy steps led us to the plain—and, gazing in that direction, I yanked both my companions flat on the ground.

Coming down the steps was a strange procession. In the lead four bearers carried a closed litter, or palanquin, on each side of which marched attendants with long palm fronds in their hands, by means of which they created an artificial breeze for its occupant. Six men brought up the rear, muskets over their shoulders. As they reached the springs immediately beneath us, we saw that all were Chinamen.

The palanquin was placed on the ground, the curtain drawn, and out stepped a mandarin, the largest Chinaman I have ever looked upon. He must have been all of seven feet tall, very broad, and in addition, enormously fat. The attendants pitched a small tent in the stream of the springs and, after the tent flap had been respectfully held back for the big man to enter, the last of them joined his fellows in the shade thrown by the litter.

Plainly the mandarin was quite some dog

and his preparation for a hot bath a real ceremony.

Before us, the giant amphitheatre for a stage, action developed like the plot on a moving picture screen. From the edge of the jungle directly across trotted out a large bull rhinoceros, its guardian angel, the Buphagus bird, flying ahead. The coolies were squatted behind the palanquin, their master still in his tent, and the great beast approached entirely unobserved.

Twenty yards from the springs, the rhinoceros bird flew back to its charge with a harsh cry of warning. The animal stood stock still for a moment, sampling the breeze; then with a squeal of rage it charged ponderously down on the empty palanquin, behind which the attendant Chinamen were sheltered from the sun.

Howling with fear, the servants fled toward the broad stairway. The horn of the furious pachiderm became entangled in the curtains of the palanquin, and it paused long enough to smash the frame to bits. The tent flap swayed back, revealing a half-naked mandarin who, taking in the situation at a glance, plunged into the tank between the hot springs. Whirling on the tent, the rhinoceros trampled it flat, then stretched its ugly head into the stream through which the figure of the immense Chinaman loomed dimly.

I rose to my feet, our heaviest rifle at my shoulder, drew a bead on the spine at the base of the short neck, and pulled trigger.

A rhinoceros hide may stop an ordinary bullet, but it's no proof against a steel capped projectile, cut to mushroom, and fired from above. The great bulk heaved one step forward and then flattened out, stone dead, while the guardian bird circled around, still uttering its warning cry.

"Come on," I commanded, rising to my feet, "let's go down and get thanked. The Lord knows what we are in for next, the only way to find out is to keep going ahead."

We left our packs where they had dropped and climbed down the narrow stairway. The Chinaman had emerged from his forced plunge, his skin so pink as to indicate the water was slightly too hot for comfort, and, gathering up some garments from the wreck of the tent, stood ready to receive us, the dead rhinoceros at his feet.

As I approached, the size of the yellow man became more apparent. He must have weighed all of four hundred pounds, and

there was something queer about his face, something horrible! To begin with a black butterfly was tattooed on his forehead, his eyebrows had been shaved, and each eye was circled by a broad ring of crimson. But it was his mouth that made the shivers run up and down my spine, for the lips had been cut away square in front, showing all his yellow, flat teeth, with two fangs, like those of a dog, at the ends. And he had no ears.

I spoke the Ida'an words of conventional greeting, and the monster mumbled their answer. Gomez and Dillingame came up behind us, and I heard the latter exclaim "My word!" Then there was a silence.

Finally the Chinaman spoke, the words hissing through his teeth.

"Whence came ye?"

I waved my hand in the general direction of the west. To tell the truth, his apparently complete absence of gratitude for preventing a rhinoceros from sharing his bath began to irritate me.

"Why came ye here?" he demanded arrogantly.

Thoroughly angry now, I jammed my hands in my pockets, determined not to answer, even by gestures. My left hand touched something round, and, feeling to see what it was, thin glass shaped beneath my fingers. A sudden inspiration came to me. I drew out the little locket I had taken from Gomez, which held the round section of black butterfly wing, and, shaking off the broken glass, stepped to the dead rhinoceros and held the talisman up to the haughty mandarin standing on the other side.

Have you, perhaps, seen one of those balloons the bairns buy at fairs slowly collapse, the skin loosening, wrinkling, finally sinking into crinkled folds? That is what happened to the man before me. His eyes started from his head, his head sank between his shoulders, and his whole, enormous body seemed to shrink, sinking in on itself. With a groan he spread his hands before his face, salaamed thrice, forehead to the ground, and his voice was a toneless whisper when he said:

"Make known thy bidding! I see the sign and am thy slave."

CHAPTER III

IN THE TEMPLE

EVEN in after days I never fully understood why Lo Chan (thus did the mandarin name himself) caved in so utterly at

the sight of the talisman. I found out before I had been long in the Land of Blood that this same small, round locket accompanied the Murut (never a Chinaman, always a Murut) who brought the tribute of gold dust to the Tong head waiting for it on the coast.

Why, in my hands, it should have such potency, remains an unsolved problem. I evolved the theory, for want of a better, that the breaking of the glass above the section of black butterfly wing had some special meaning in the complicated and mysterious ritual of the Tong.

Such speculations have small significance, however. What really mattered was the fact that the mandarin recognized in the talisman a power that he feared and dared not disobey, and was, in his own words, immediately my slave.

Lo Chan stepped over the dead rhinoceros and blew a blast on a silver whistle, carved in the semblance of a dragon. The coolies reappeared at the top of the broad stairway and came timidly down to the springs. Evidently assuming that we wished to be taken to his headquarters, the Chinaman ordered his servants to pick up our packs, and himself led the way out of the amphitheatre.

It was apparent that walking was not the mandarin's favorite form of exercise, and I was rather sorry for that enormous bulk of a man tolling ahead in the burning sun, sorry as it was possible to be for anyone so utterly repulsive physically.

From the sunken amphitheatre we continued in the direction of the stream, which we struck after two miles of heavy going through sand, and then followed over a road, always sloping downward, paved with large blocks of stone, their surfaces worn as though by innumerable feet. Vegetation reappeared, gradually thickening into jungle, and in the distance rose what I took for a hill of bare rock.

The stream lost itself in wet, swampy ground on either side of the stone causeway; tree tops met overhead, shutting out the light, and we came at last to a long house of bamboo, set upon piles. Ladders admitted us beneath the thatched roof, and we were in Lo Chan's home.

Certainly that fat mandarin did not believe in discomfort. The house was no different in construction from the usual Ida'an dwelling, a single sixty-foot room with no partitions or front; but its contents were of a richness none of us had ever dreamed of. Silk rugs of brilliant colors strewed the floors; on the walls were

hung embroideries heavy with gold; there were inlaid tabourets, vases as high as a man's head, and low couches heaped with pillows.

A corner, hidden behind silver-embossed screens, held the complete paraphernalia of the opium smoker, and a great gold-and-red curtain, whence came feminine rustlings and whisperings, barred off one end of the long room.

Behind this curtain Lo Chan retired with a last profound salaam, and we were left alone.

Dillingame began to laugh. They are a feckless people, the English; I could see no joke.

"For a cautious Scotchman as you claim to be," he announced, "it seems to me you are taking big chances. That piece of butterfly's wing is a frail excuse for bossing a mandarin."

"You're a fool," stuttered Gomez, "a reckless fool to run us into this. Do you suppose for one minute that you can trust that mandarin? Do you know what the mutilation of his face means? He has been guilty of the vilest crime a Chinaman can commit; he's a parricide! Had he been a coolie he would have been burned to death. His rank saved him, but not from mutilation that all his race might know and scorn him, and he has plainly been banished to this corner of the world. Give me back that piece of butterfly wing before you get us into more trouble. It's mine, anyway!"

I think I have already said that I am a Scotchman, and therefore firm—not obstinate, firm; and once I have set myself to follow a certain course I am not to be turned aside. Besides, the Portuguese showed an awful cheek in trying to run matters, considering his general reputation and what we especially knew of him. I promptly told him to mind his own business, that I had brought him to the very source of the gold, and that I'd keep the talisman.

Dillingame backed me up, of course, and together we quickly silenced the vicious little runt.

With sundown came a meal the like of which we had not tasted for many a month. Lo Chan did not reappear, and we slept that night through in absolute comfort.

In the morning there was a council. Gomez urged a direct demand for gold and a quick departure. Trevor had no suggestion to make except that we do something at once. I proposed to let matters develop along their own lines, trying to pump our

host without arousing his suspicions that we really hadn't the slightest idea what we were doing.

We called the mandarin in and I asked him for a report on his stewardship. Of course I had no idea what I meant, but it seemed a safe question. He answered that the coolies had been unable to wash out the usual quantity of gold, the workings were not half as rich as formerly, but that the temple tribute came in regularly every full of the moon.

Not much information in all this. The only thing I could think of was to take a look at the temple, and I ordered him on. The wet jungle was cut by numerous stone causeways, between which I soon decided, had once been rice fields, now grown up save for occasional patches of paddy, to great trees. Everywhere were indications of a once flourishing city, stone roads, ruined houses also often of stone, and the worn surface of the rock on which we walked.

Finally the jungle opened, revealing what I had taken for an elevation of naked rock, and we halted in amazement. Built of blocks of stone, the size of which made it seem impossible they could have been moved by human hands, rose an immense, pagoda-like structure of three great stories, the topmost crowned with a single enormous block of glittering stone.

Strange beasts were carved on the overhanging balconies, and plaques of metal hung down in clusters, tinkling musically in the slight breeze. A small pond, surrounded by a rampart of stone, its edges overgrown with white lilies, spread out in front of the temple, and the water in its centre, bubbling up ceaselessly, was red as blood.

In every cranny where the tropic vegetation could find a foothold it flourished, but not even the great rending power of its growth had been able to move the enormous blocks, and bring to the ground the astonishing edifice. And there was a queer air of emptiness about it, as though it had just been deserted by a multitude that might swarm back at any moment.

INTO dim coolness we entered through a lofty square portico. There was absolute silence save for two sounds—the hushed clink of the swaying metallic plaques and a muffled murmur as though of running water. The ground floor was a great bare room of solid rock, with an aperture in the ceiling opening up all the way to the sky through the successive floors, and down

which came a thin shaft of light. A strong ladder led up to this aperture, and towards it I pushed the mandarin. But he drew back with an exclamation of horror.

"It is not permitted!"

"Mount," I ordered, and he preceded me, obedient, though trembling.

The next story was full of vague rustlings from a floor knee deep in green foliage. Something moved at my feet, and I bent down. Seven inches long and black as jet, a thick caterpillar was eating ravenously into a camphor tree leaf.

Dillingame picked it up between his long fingers and together we examined it. Never have I looked on anything more repulsive than that twisting, worm-like creature. Unlike any caterpillar I had ever seen, it was furnished with heavy, piercing jaws—it was a flesh-eating, predacious thing that could have bitten through a finger.

"Pretty, isn't it?" commented Trevor, snapping it back disgustedly among the leaves.

At the end of the room were piled great wicker baskets whence came the sound as though of running water. We knew what those baskets held, of course; the red tree frogs from the coast. To make sure I threw back a lid. A crimson cloud floated about me as the little piping things sailed out, to fall among the leaves on the floor.

Then happened something horrible. Like lightning black caterpillars fastened their ugly jaws to the tree frogs, paralyzing them so that in a moment all were silent and still. It was plain that these joyous, crimson travelers were tid-bits indeed to the black larvae—undoubtedly brought from the coast for this purpose.

Rather shaken, I shepherded Lo Chan before us down the ladder and we hurried out into the warm sunshine. The blood-red pond with its border of snow-white water lilies heaved and bubbled as some great body swam across it barely under the water, so as to leave a swirling wake. Half running, half hopping along the causeways, bent figures sped before us. One of them swarmed up the trunk of a tree with all the agility of a monkey. Nearer, we saw that they were those same beast-men whom Kratas, the priestess, had brought down on us in the jungle.

"Let's go back to the house," urged Dillingame, "and kind of orient ourselves before we see any more horrors."

I motioned to Lo Chan to lead the way, and we retraced our steps. The Chinaman kept glancing back at me, and I knew instinctively that something was wrong—I

had blundered in some detail, and he suspected I was not really what he had first taken me for.

Gomez broke out again as soon as we were alone.

"What's the use of all this waiting?" he demanded. "Why not ask the mandarin for all the gold he has, and get out of here? I'm afraid—me! There is magic all around us, black magic. . . . Those frightful worms!"

"Shut up and let me think," I answered crossly. "We have got to make up our minds to some definite plan of action—though I'm hanged if I know what!"

"The first thing to do is to go back and get some of those caterpillars," broke in Trevor. "I'll wager they are the larvae from which the black butterflies develop, even if predacious butterfly larvae had never been heard of before. Also I'll wager we run into Kratas before long."

The Portuguese shivered.

"I'm not going back to that place of evil," he announced decidedly, "especially if there is any chance of meeting the witch."

"Besides, we must look into that red pond and find out what that big thing swimming under water was," continued Dillingame, paying no attention to the interruption.

"Let's have a pow-wow with the Chinese first of all," I suggested, and clapped my hands to summon him.

Lo Chan emerged from behind the red-and-gold curtain, and salaamed. It may have been imagination, but I seemed to detect that there was not quite the same degree of reverence he had shown in the past.

"I desire to look into the matter of the gold," I announced, making my statement as indefinite as possible.

"This afternoon we will go to the diggings," and he salaamed anew.

"What's he saying?" demanded Dillingame, and I translated.

"We're going back to the temple this afternoon," the Englishman insisted obstinately. "Put off the other trip till tomorrow."

"Why not let me go with him," eagerly suggested Gomez, "while you two attend to other matters?"

For a moment I hesitated. The Portuguese was not to be trusted, and I did not know what he might hatch out against us. On the other hand, since he could speak no Ida'an or Chinese, how could he plot with the mandarin? Ashamed of my fears, I gave my consent and advised Lo Chan

that only Gomez would accompany him. Again he bowed and withdrew.

Then, since the sun was at its height and it was insufferably hot, we stretched ourselves on the cold *kajang* matting for a noontime siesta.

WE WERE not destined to visit the temple that afternoon, the next day, or the day after; nor did Gomez get to the gold diggings. After an hour's uneasy doze we woke fairly gasping for breath. The heat lay over the world like a heavy blanket, there was not a breath of air, and it was rapidly growing darker. Came a moaning in the tree tops, gradually rising to a roar. Coolies clamped heavy shutters over the open front of the house and then scurried for shelter.

The roar increased to thunder, a breath of cool wind slipped in through the loosely woven walls, and then came the rain, a solid sheet of water crashing onto the ground as though hurled from above.

The coolies brought lights and, unable to make ourselves heard in the awful tumult, we settled down to wait for the end of the storm. Gomez began cooking opium pills and was soon lost in oblivion. Trevor found some rice-paper and I tried to teach him more of the Ida'an dialect (he had picked up quite a bit by himself) spelling out the words phonetically.

It rained without ceasing the next day and the next; then at sundown the storm came to an end as quickly as it had begun. The shutters were removed from the front of the house, Gomez emerged from his opium trance, and Trevor and I could hear each other speak. All ground between the stone causeways was under water and every curved leaf was a miniature fountain of silvery spray.

For half an hour we stretched our legs outside and then returned for the rest that had been impossible during the roar of the rain. The sun sank, the birds became silent, and my companions' deep breathing soon told me that they had found sleep.

From the jungle, clear and pure as a silver thread, floated a voice:

"Gone is the wind, the rain is past,
The moonlit night is here at last.
I wait, all longing, wait for thee,
Come fast, my love, come fast to me.

"My skin is pale as the jasmine flower,
(Oh, haste you, love, 'tis the sacred hour!)
My breath is sweet as the *areca* bloom,
Where its purple cups in the darkness loom!"

Trevor snorted in his sleep and I stirred him with my elbow. "Wake up," I whispered. "You are being serenaded. You or that other handsome laddie, the mandarin."

"As the *epidendrum* holds the *anguska* tree,
Musk-scented, my arms shall twine 'round thee;
As the teak is held by the clinging vine,
Thus shall thy lips be held to mine!"

"It's Kratas," exclaimed Dillingame, sitting up, "and she isn't serenading that fat Chinaman, either! What did that last verse mean?"

"Leave this place as quick as you can,
I much prefer the fat Chinaman,
Or I'll have to jab a poison dart
Straight through the middle of your heart."

I translated obligingly—this love affair seemed to me to be verging on the serious.

"You're a liar," he answered promptly, and stepped out boldly into the darkness.

"Come back, you fool," I called after him. "You'll get a knife stuck into you!" But he had disappeared.

Groaning at the stark idiocy of it—Trevor had never shown himself a ladies' man before—I followed down the ladder. Somewhere in the blackness the girl laughed. My foot went off the causeway and I plumped down into the water.

Crawling out again, and cussing beneath my breath, I listened. There was no sound. Disgusted, I climbed back, shed my wet clothes and rolled up in a blanket. Again came the girl's laugh from out of the night. The ladder creaked beneath Trevor's weight and he scratched a match. Around his neck was a jasmine wreath and he held a small palm-leaf package in his hand.

"Did she kiss you?" I asked him disagreeably.

"None of your business, but I couldn't get close enough to her," he growled. "She just chucked the flowers around my neck, gave me this bundle and vanished. I couldn't think of the Ida'an for 'come back,' either."

IN THE tropics, the morning after a storm is always beautiful. The coolness still lingers, and everything is fresh green and has generally grown about a yard. We woke full of energy; even Gomez seemed to feel no ill effects from his opium debauch, and

decided to carry out our original program of visiting the temple while the Portuguese accompanied the Chinaman to the gold diggings.

I was about to clap my hands to summon Lo Chan when he lurched from behind the red-and-gold curtain. Evidently opium had also been his solace for the last two days, and the effects had not worn off. At any rate, he omitted the customary salaam and began a rather heated harangue.

According to the laws of the Tong (so he said) certain privileges were due him, and I had given no intimation that I intended to grant them. For example, even if I had been sent to take his place, I should have told him at once of the manner and time of his death—it was his right. Also where was the acknowledgment of the last tribute of gold sent to the coast, and his written sentence from the Tong?

More and more inflamed by his own words and still swayed by the poppy drug, he began to wave his arms.

How did he know we hadn't stolen the black butterfly talisman? That we weren't impostors? What kept him from calling in his coolies and having us strung up by the thumbs?

This sort of talk couldn't go on, of course. The drugged man was lashing himself into a fury. I gave Dillingame a signal (he always did the fighting for both of us), and the Chinaman went down to an uppercut nicely combined with a trip.

"Dog of a parricide," I thundered, "you shall die a death unnamed, nor shall I tell you when! Who are you, scum of the earth, to question the black butterfly's wing?" and I hauled it out of my pocket.

Lo Chan got slowly to his feet and salaamed, all the fight knocked out of him.

"'Twas a madness," he mumbled. "I do my lord's bidding."

Gomez was scared to death of the big Chinaman after this outburst, but his desire to see the place whence the gold came prevailed over his fears, and away the two then went, surrounded by a guard of coolies.

The very first thing Trevor and I did when we were alone was to open the little package Kratas had given to the Englishman the night before. Inside the palm leaf wrapping was a soft piece of native cloth, which we unrolled, bringing to light two eight-inch-long cocoons, jet black, their fine silk-like threads woven as closely as a piece of line. Dillingame split one open with the sharp blade of his knife and the pupa tumbled out on the floor.

Most pupae of butterflies make you think of angels or souls in transition. This one looked exactly like the devil disguised in the form of a dragon.

"Let's see that butterfly talisman," he demanded, and I laid it before him while he was trying to dissect out the embryonic wing. The pupa was not sufficiently developed to show wing veination, though, so he carefully replaced it in its silk cocoon and did it up with the other.

"Keep the talisman," I suggested, "and try to ask Kratas about it in the intervals of your unholy love-making."

I overhauled our weapons carefully, as became a cautious man, before starting for the temple, and we set out heavily armed. There was water on either side of the causeways and the stones beneath our feet were steaming wet. A little wind fanned the tree-tops and the whole world seemed to be a waving silver-and-green symphony.

It was not a deserted world, however, as it had been on our previous expedition. The little beast-men were trotting along the stone roads, pressing timorously to the edges while we passed, and all converging in the same direction toward the temple. They lined the rampart around the pond, no longer blood red, in which we had seen the mysterious ripple, and the square in front of the portico was one solid mass of them. There must have been two thousand of the ape-like beings, and from this great multitude came not a sound.

"Go on or hang back?" I interrogated Trevor.

"On, since we started," he answered. "Besides, they haven't even their blow-guns."

The crowd opened silently before us as we strode toward the entrance of the temple. Inside, it was as empty as when we had first visited it, save that a single, thin shaft of sunlight came down through the aperture above.

"Come on," called Dillingame, and I followed him upward. The sides being shuttered in, it was quite dark at first as we stood on the top rounds of the ladder and tried to pierce the gloom. The bar of light broadened and I saw the edge of the sun overhead. Dimly we made out that the foliage had been removed from the floor; then as the light increased, we saw the walls hung everywhere with the long, black cocoons, the resting stage into which the black caterpillars had entered.

The sun came square over the hole at the top of the temple, shining down so bright-

ly into our eyes that we were blinded; and at the same moment came a murmur from outside as though each member of the crowd had drawn a single, simultaneous deep breath.

"Next act. Let's see it," I suggested, and we backed down the ladder, shielding our eyes from the glare.

A LONG a causeway to the left, where we were turned all the beast-men's faces, slowly advanced a group of strangely clad figures. Closer, we made out that they were old, old women, wrinkled, bent, tottering, clothed in strips of many-colored cloths that fluttered from their scrawny shoulders. Immediately before the temple they halted and opened out. In their midst appeared one of the beast-men, and bound to his back was the wizened Chinaman we had met leading the Ida'ans whose baskets contained the little red tree frogs.

Suddenly the old women broke into a cackling chorus:

"Pale is the pool with the silver rim,
Pale should be red,
So we send you to him.
When the sun has painted the world to gold
Pale shall be red as it was of old."

"Pale is the pool with the silver rim,
Hungry is he,
So we send you to him.
When the sun has painted the world to gold
Pale shall be red as it was of old."

Straight through the crowd came Kratas till she stood among the shrinking old hags. Catching the beast-man, who bore the Chinaman bound to his back, by the hair, she led him to the edge of the lily-bordered pool.

"Pale is the pool with the silver rim,
Waiting is he.
So go to him.
When the sun has painted the world to gold
Pale shall be red as it was of old,"

chanted the cracked voices.

The captive shrieked and struggled on the beast-man's back. With a mighty heave, Kratas sent them over the ramp into the water, their impetus carrying them beyond the border of white lilies.

The center of the pool bubbled as they sank. Up they came, something tipped with pink, something on a thick black stem pushing them half out of the water and fastening to their bodies. For a moment

the miserable bound creatures were above the surface; then were drawn slowly under, the water reddening about them.

It all happened so quickly, was done so mechanically, that it was doubly horrible.

"Pretty sweetheart you have," I managed to gasp, "feeding live men to some water monster!"

Dillingame's eyes were popping from his head, but at my words his jaw set.

"Criminals, probably," he stuttered. "She was only seeing justice done—and the pool had to be red."

"Look here," I cried out in horror, "are you defending that—that witch? Have you gone crazy?"

He did not answer; his eyes were on the girl, who was coming through the scattering crowd. I plucked at his sleeve.

"Let's go from here," I begged.

I so hated, and still do hate that woman—indeed, I think she has made me hate all women—that my conscience forces me to do her justice in spite of the wrong she did me. As she stood before us smiling at Dillingame she was beautiful as a dream of Paradise, a goddess of the golden age, Eve, the first woman whence all after drew their charm. I forgot that she was a savage, forgot her beast-men had shot the harmless *Ida'an* porters, how she had wantonly slain one of them with the poisoned arrow; even forgot the tragedy of the two bound wretches cast to a horrible death in the water-lily-bordered pool. All I could see was that she was beautiful, desirable beyond the whole world.

Paying no attention to me, she halted not a hand's breadth from Trevor, and spoke:

"I am Kratas, priestess of the Land of Blood, who knows not death, who lives forever. The lives of all men—your life—are between my hands.

"I am Kratas, the priestess, guardian of the souls of the dead. Even the sable butterflies are beneath my law.

"I am Kratas, who guards the yellow dust all strangers desire.

"I am Kratas, all-powerful, and I come at set of sun to take you to my house as my slave and mate."

"I don't get that last part," complained Dillingame, turning to me.

"Merely a proposal that will not take 'no' for an answer," I explained. "Shall I tell the lassie you'll think it over?"

"She's very beautiful," he sighed, letting his eyes stray to her.

"The Great Lord from Afar has already a wife whom he loves," I explained hastily

in *Ida'an*, "and *orang putehs* have but one mate."

Her arms were around his shoulders now, and she gave me one venomous backward glance.

"Her blood shall fatten hungry leeches," she hissed, "and he will forget . . ." Her lips found his.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRICE OF MY FREEDOM

DILLINGAME and I quarreled bitterly when we got back to Lo Chan's house. The man was mad, bewitched, and in his stark obstinacy defended himself. Hadn't he a perfect right to kiss a pretty girl if he wanted to? Hadn't she spared us when she might have wiped us out any minute? Wasn't it through her that we hoped to get the black butterfly—and gold?

There was no arguing with such a maniac, and I told him so.

Gomez came back alone, around four o'clock, and in a most disconsolate state of mind. It seems that the gold diggings were in the bottom of a dry creek and the rain had brought down an entire bluff on top of them. The little man was in despair, whined and bemoaned his fate that he had ever come with us, and declared himself ruined.

To tell the truth, we paid little attention to him. Dillingame was stretched out on one of the *kajang* mats looking exasperatingly comfortable and complacent. I was sulkily packing up our belongings at the other end of the house—and it was to me that Gomez gravitated.

The trouble with villains is that they are apt to consider the rest of the world as bad as they are, especially when it is a question of gold. Gomez proceeded to tell me that as soon as he had found out Lo Chan understood Portuguese he had pretended to conspire with him, to discover what he could. He suggested to the Chinaman that Dillingame and I be murdered, and, the piece of black butterfly wing in their possession, they grab all the gold in sight and flee to Dutch Borneo.

Lo Chan had been delighted with the murdering idea when he learned that the talisman was Gomez's property—"had to tell him that, you know"—explained the little man ingenuously—and confided to him that, without it, he would be unable to collect the tribute from the temple.

As to fleeing to Dutch Borneo, however,

he did not want to because of the difficulty of transporting his three wives.

"My plan now is," the little villain continued, "to pretend to be hand-in-glove with Lo Chan, and through the black butterfly locket—which seems to be the key to the situation—hold him in check. I will let him have the talisman to collect the tribute, then we'll kill him and return to Brunei."

Fine arrangement, wasn't it? All Gomez wanted was to get the little round locket in his hands and then it would be good-by to us. I lost no time in passing all this up to Dillingame, and he lost no time in kicking the Portuguese down the ladder. It was not a diplomatic thing to do, but I couldn't altogether blame him.

We paid for it later, as you will see.

Gomez did not return, and Trevor and I picked up our quarrel where we had left off. I argued for an immediate return to Brunei; what we had already collected would show a good profit on the expedition. Further intercourse with the Portuguese was all but impossible. Dillingame obstinately stood out for waiting till we had secured a specimen of the black butterfly—in other words, until the pupae had developed in the cocoons and emerged; and added that he might trade for some more gold from Kratas—that she seemed to like him.

Seemed to like him! I should say she did! That was my main anxiety, combined with the fact that *he* "seemed to like" *her*.

We argued, if facts being presented by him can be called arguing, till nearly dark, and then we ceased speaking to each other.

Behind the gold-and-red curtain at the end of the house a woman screamed, and the sound was cut off short as though someone had grabbed her by the windpipe. Instinctively we jumped for our weapons. Without the slightest warning the curtain went down, unmasking a huddled crowd of coolies armed with muskets. I yanked Dillingame to the floor just as the house was filled with the roar and smoke of a volley.

"Got me through the shoulder," he gasped, and rolling over, turned loose with his automatic. I pumped my rifle into the thick of the smoke, and then they were upon us.

The first Chinese face that loomed up before me changed to a blur of blood beneath the butt of my gun. With my foot I slid a couch in front of us and then hauled the Englishman to his feet.

In a yellow avalanche the coolies piled over our frail barricade. Dillingame swing-

ing a heavy tabouret, cleared the floor in front of him. I literally blew men from the mouth of my pistol. The smoke rose. I tried to slip in new shells, but there was no time. Over the motionless or squirming bodies of their companions they were upon us again. The Englishman went down, dragging a half a dozen of his assailants with him. Forced against the wall, my arms were twisted upward, a cord slipped around my wrists, binding me helpless, and my knees were pinioned.

The fight had been voiceless, just a silent striving punctuated by the firearms, till this moment, when there was a scream of deadly fear from a coolie. In the open front of the house stood Kratas, her face a mask of rage. From beneath the jasmine wreaths that clothed the upper part of her body she snatched a long knife, and, light as a butterfly, sprang over the couch to where Dillingame lay.

THREE times the knife fell, dripping red after each stroke, and she rolled three dead Chinamen from the body of the unconscious Englishman. Then, with one sweep of her round arms she swung him to her shoulders, spat out some words I did not understand to the cowering coolies, and heedless of my frantic yell for help, went swiftly down the ladder with her limp burden.

The house was a shambles. There were no less than a dozen dead and wounded men lying about, not counting the three Kratas had knifed. Floor, walls, couches and overturned screens were splashed with blood, and the air was heavy with gunpowder and the smell of death.

Gently enough, though I cursed them, I was bound to a bamboo couch, a cushion even being slipped under my head to ease it. The gold-and-red curtain at the end of the room was replaced, dead and wounded were carried away, and I was left in the darkening twilight.

Not for long, however. I heard Gomez speaking in Portuguese at the bottom of the ladder.

"I hope they are both dead, damn 'em. You may take the talisman from Freeman and keep it, for all I care. Just give me a load of gold and I'll find my way down into Dutch Borneo somehow."

"True friend," purred Lo Chan, "it shall be as you desire," and they both came up the ladder.

"You turn me loose, Gomez," I roared, "or I'll beat you to death later."

"I'm going to kill you slowly as soon as

I have taken away that talisman," he snarled, "you all-virtuous, heavy-handed fool!" and he began to investigate my pockets.

I shut my jaws tight and let them search me. Finally they stripped off most of my clothes and literally tore them to pieces.

"Where's that butterfly thing?" demanded the Portuguese furiously.

"I gave it to Dillingame," I answered in Portuguese so both would understand.

"Dillingame is dead, thanks to me," said Gomez, also in Portuguese. "We'll take a look at his body, Lo Chan."

"He's not dead, as you will soon find out," I interrupted. "Kratas carried him off and the talisman is with him."

"Santa Maria! That witch again!" and the little man crossed himself.

His perturbation was nothing to the terror that convulsed the mandarin's frightfully mutilated face, making it doubly hideous.

"If Kratas gets that talisman, I shall die the unknown death," he wailed to me. "Go, go at once to Dillingame Tuan and beg it of him for me! I will send you from here unharmed, I swear it by the sacred black butterfly, and with all the gold three strong men can carry!"

"What of this swine?" I asked, jerking my head toward Gomez. "Speak Ida'an so he may not understand."

"He shall be burnt over slow fire for your imperial pleasure, or thrown into the silver-rimmed pond. You may see him torn with hot pincers or fed living to the fire ants of the jungle. . . ."

"Enough," I commanded, and translated carefully into English for the Portuguese's benefit.

"Get the sable butterfly's wing and we will kill the Chinaman," he whined back at me. "You wouldn't have a fellow Christian done to death by a yellow, heathen, a companion murdered in cold blood!"

"Nothing I'd enjoy more," I answered heartily. "Now, turn me loose."

On my feet, freed of bonds, I restrained myself, though with difficulty, from kicking the little man—it had brought us bad luck before. Food appeared, and with it two iron-bound chests that were humbly laid at my feet. Raising the covers I saw they were filled to the brim with raw gold-dust.

Again, his eyes on the yellow metal, Gomez began to plead that I join him in murdering the mandarin and make away with his fortune. I had just finished

translating this for Lo Chan's benefit, just so everything would be nice and friendly, when Kratas stepped in from the darkness.

Without as much as a glance at the other two men she beckoned to me, and I followed her down the ladder. Catching my hand she guided me through the shadows along the causeway. Before the red pond she stopped for a breath, and pointed.

"If he dies—you go there," she hissed.

Past the temple we went and into the black jungle. Ahead of us a voice began to sing, and the words were in English.

"They stuck him full of pins to remind him of his sins,

And still he swilled down beer and rum together.

So they cut off his fool head and filled him full of lead—

And a boy's best friend is his mother."

"He prays to his gods," sighed Kratas, dragging me on faster.

I sprang up the ladder into a torch-lit house and hurried to Trevor's side. He was tossing on a broad bamboo couch, a bandage of crushed leaves against his wounded shoulder, and his eyes hot and wild with fever. For a moment he recognized me.

"Hello, Andy, old top! Come to preserve the proprieties, hey? You're a hell of a chaperon.

"Oh, Andy married Margaret,

Oh, Andy married Jane:

He gave his name to Mary

Eloped then with Elaine. . . ."

and he was in the clutch of the fever-devils again.

Thirty long anxious days Kratas and I nursed the Englishman, nursed him with the care and tenderness that a man receives only from his best friend and the woman who loves him.

Each morning Gomez appeared before the house and begged for the butterfly talisman, and each morning I cursed him and bade him be gone.

Kratas, beautiful as a dream of bliss and tender as a mother, never left the sick man's side save twice, and both times I heard the cackling chorus from the direction of the lily-bordered crimson pond.

"Pale is the pool with the silver rim,

Waiting is he,

So go to him.

When the sun has painted the world to gold
Pale shall be red as it was of old."

The thirty-first day, Dillingame's fever broke, and he knew me, reaching out his hand with a little unsteady smile. Kratas knelt beside him and her lips brushed his as lightly as a passing butterfly. Then he slept.

ONCE Trevor was on the road to recovery, his progress was rapid. In a week he was up and could walk about, though still woefully thin and white. Kratas was unceasing in her devotion and had a retinue of old women—the priestesses clad in the strange garments of strips of colored cloths—waiting on and cooking for him.

Our traps had been brought from Lo Chan's house, and I found time to do quite a bit of collecting, always in the opposite direction from the temple. I couldn't even think of that place without a shudder.

Conditions would have been ideal for a man who loved the jungle and found happiness in solving its secrets had it not been for one thing; Kratas was jealous of every word I spoke to the Englishman. He had made marvelous progress in the Ida'an tongue, and they held long conversations together, part of which Dillingame retailed to me, throwing some light on our situation.

Kratas's story of her own life was extremely simple. She calmly asserted that she was the first woman that had been put on earth; and that she would live forever.

Years ago there were many brothers of Lo Chan in the wilderness, who had built the temple and washed out great stores of gold, which were buried beneath it. Then they had all died, and for a long time there were no Chinaman. Finally Lo Chan and his coolies appeared with the black butterfly talisman to vouch for them, and had started to wash for gold.

Each full of the moon, according to the age-long custom, he was given as many quills of the precious metal as he could hold in both hands; but while in past years the dust had been collected by the beast-men, it was now drawn from the horde beneath the temple. This tribute was then sent to the coast by a Murut, who carried the round piece of butterfly's wing as a passport.

The messenger had not returned from his last trip (Gomez could have told why), but he was expected any moment, since the time of tribute was but two days off.

In regard to the lily-bordered pool, the

information was extremely sketchy. It was there dwelt the God of Blood, father of the black butterflies; but what exactly that god was, Kratas did not make clear.

"You see, Andy," Trevor explained to me a dozen times, "what we consider cruel bloodthirstiness in the girl is nothing but custom—a heritage from her ancestors. Since she has always been supreme, the life of a miserable beast-man means nothing to her. Consider for a moment how frightful it must seem to her that we catch and kill butterflies—the souls of the dead!"

He was teaching her to speak English, too; though I hardly saw the necessity of beginning with "darling" for the first noun, and "love" for the verb.

Gomez had not appeared for several days, but that morning he came to the foot of our ladder with an entirely new plan. Lo Chan had promised to send out the gold by him if the Murut did not return—"As I know well he will not," he interjected—if he could secure the black butterfly talisman, which, once recovered, Lo Chan had sworn should never again leave his hands. Instead of going to Brunei we could simply steer for Dutch Borneo, the Portuguese explained, and make away with the gold. He begged and pleaded for the talisman, but I only cursed him while Trevor laughed and tantalized him by holding it up so he might see it.

A pretty pair they made, Gomez and Lo Chan, cold-blooded murderers, both of them, and each continually plotting to destroy the other. Lo Chan's plot, in this instance, was perfectly plain to us. Gomez and his gold would never leave the Land of Blood without the black butterfly wing talisman.

That evening the three of us were sitting in the dusk, and Trevor and I were engaged in a long argument regarding the possible food plants of some new species of butterflies. Twice Kratas had spoken to the Englishman and, absorbed in what we were discussing, he had not answered her.

Without the slightest warning she was on her feet with a snarl of rage.

"Offspring of the wild hog, killer of the souls of the dead," she shrieked at me, "you have dared too much! You would steal my Lord Trevor from me. Now you shall die. I have spoken who cannot unsay my words!"

Quick as a snake, she sprang at me, and I caught the bare blade of her knife in my left hand so it cut deep into the fingers. Dillingame threw himself upon her and I wisely retreated down the ladder. For a

long time he tried to soothe her, but quite in vain. She was absolutely determined on my death—she had spoken who could not unsay her words.

Finally he got her calmed and willing to let me live for the present—and he won this concession with kisses.

My hand bled freely, the blood even soaking through a bandage, and I lay down on my bamboo couch near Dillingame with the pleasant feeling that I should probably be murdered in my sleep.

I woke at dawn to a pang of agony from my wounded hand. There was a great hole in the mosquito net and a soft black thing brushed my face.

Wide awake, as the pain increased, I looked down on a sable butterfly, a foot from wing tip to wing tip, poised above my head, its powerful jaws tearing and biting through the bloody bandage until they reached the live flesh beneath. Light as air it evaded me; then I smothered it beneath folds of the netting, giving it that pinch every butterfly collector knows and it went limp. Marveling at the wonder of those sloe-black wings and fierce jaws, the like of which had never before been known among butterflies, I pinned it, finally, in the cyanide poison box. And it was borne in on me that this winged creature was a cannibal thing that came to human blood.

At intervals all through the next day Gomez came to our house and pleaded desperately for the talisman.

Kratas would not speak to me that day, only glared; and Trevor was plainly disturbed. At last she set out toward the temple and twice we heard the chorus that indicated another wretch had gone to the horrible unknown death in the blood-red pool. It was an anxious twelve hours, and in the evening Kratas simply sent me out of the house while she talked with Trevor.

It rained that night as it rains in the tropics, the drops coming down so that the world held no other sound but their crashing fall. I could not sleep, more than alarmed since I had not been able to get one single word alone with Trevor. Even now Kratas, awake and motionless, crouched in the dark between our beds.

Hours slipped by and suddenly I was conscious of a spot of shadow against the darkness moving silently nearer and nearer to where Dillingame slept. On my feet, I touched the girl's bare shoulder and she sprang forward as though shot from a bow.

The rain drowned all sound of the struggle and I struck a light. Gomez, his hands twisted behind his back, lay on his face, a broad-bladed knife by his side. Dillingame moaned in his sleep and the girl hastily dragged her captive within the house.

"Lo Chan sent him to murder Trevor," I shouted to her above the noise.

She nodded, her face black with fury, and quicker than a wildcat twisted the Portuguese onto his back, burying her

knife in his throat. An imperative hand bade me begone, and as the match flickered out I saw her slip an earthen vase beneath the couch to catch the blood dripping from the dead man's severed jugular vein. When morning came she was still crouched by Dillingame's couch, and all our weapons had disappeared.

Not a word would Kratas let us exchange, her knife at my throat whenever I turned to the Englishman, and the sun was just rising when she led me down the ladder.

"This looks like the end of Andy Freeman," I shouted back to him.

"Kratas, if harm befalls my friend, I too, die," called Dillingame. "Here, take this, Trevor," and he flung at my feet the chamois skin bag that held the black butterfly talisman.

THE same painfully silent crowd of beast-men was before the temple. Inside, the ladder to the second story had been removed and a thin shaft of sunlight came down through the hole in the ceiling, gilding a pile of porcupine quills, through whose transparent sides winked the glint of gold. The old hags with their garments of multi-colored strips of cloth filed in, the leader carrying a covered earthenware vase, which she laid at Kratas's feet. The ray of sunlight from above broadened and the priestess began to sing:

"Fill up thy hands with the golden thing.
Both hands cram-full of the dust we bring
From the secret horde alone we know,
Stored up by thy brothers long ago."

Lo Chan, his horrible features dead white, entered the temple alone and stood before the pile of porcupine quills.

"The moon is full, thy people pay,
Lord of the Pool, on this thy day,
Tribute to those who long did raise
This temple to thy glorious praise."

Through the aperture above came a solid shaft of sunlight, filling it to the edges. A sable butterfly sped down this golden stream of light; another, and then another, until the air was black with their wings. Lo Chan bent down, burying his hands among the heavy quills; and at that very moment Kratas poured the contents of the earthenware vase over his back and shoulders, soaking him from head to foot with red blood. The China-

man straightened up with a startled cry.

First one and then a swarm of black butterflies darted upon him till his body was all but concealed beneath their quivering wings. He staggered toward the door, beating with shrieks of anguish at the monstrous flying things that fastened to his wrists, his lips, his face. The hole above vomited out a solid column of the horrible insects, and Lo Chan was smothered beneath them.

The mass of quivering wings rose from the ground, hurtled out into the sunlight. Once the man broke free and rushed toward the lily-bordered pool. Then they were on him again, whirled him in their midst above the water.

The surface broke and a pink thing protruded out into the light, a gaping pink mouth a foot broad attached to seven feet of flat, inky body that now lay on the surface—a loathsome, gigantic leech.

The butterflies raised their victim ten feet in air, then slowly sank down with him toward the water. The pink head of the leech went blindly groping among the sable wings; then man and butterflies together disappeared beneath the bubbling water that soon had changed to a livid pink.

For a moment they reappeared, then sank once more, and only the ripples rocking the big white lilies disturbed the calm of the blood-red pool.

"Let us go back," I begged Kratas, a great nausea coming over me.

"You go back to the land whence you came," she answered, "living only through my infinite mercy."

Before the bamboo house were waiting five of the beast-men loaded with my baggage. I attempted to mount the ladder, but Kratas jerked me back, and herself ascended.

"It's no use, Andy," said Trevor from above. "You have to go or die. I can not move the girl, and our weapons are gone."

"But aren't you coming?" I whispered, a great horror over me.

"No," he said. "No. It is only by staying that I bought your life. The talisman will protect you on your way out."

Behind him Kratas leaned against his shoulder and snuggled her cheek to his.

"Come back—some time," he said, looking down at me. "I sha'nt be unhappy here, but—come back—some time."

The jasmine-clad girl slipped one beautiful, warm arm around his neck and raised her face to his. Their lips met. . . .