

# Weird Tales

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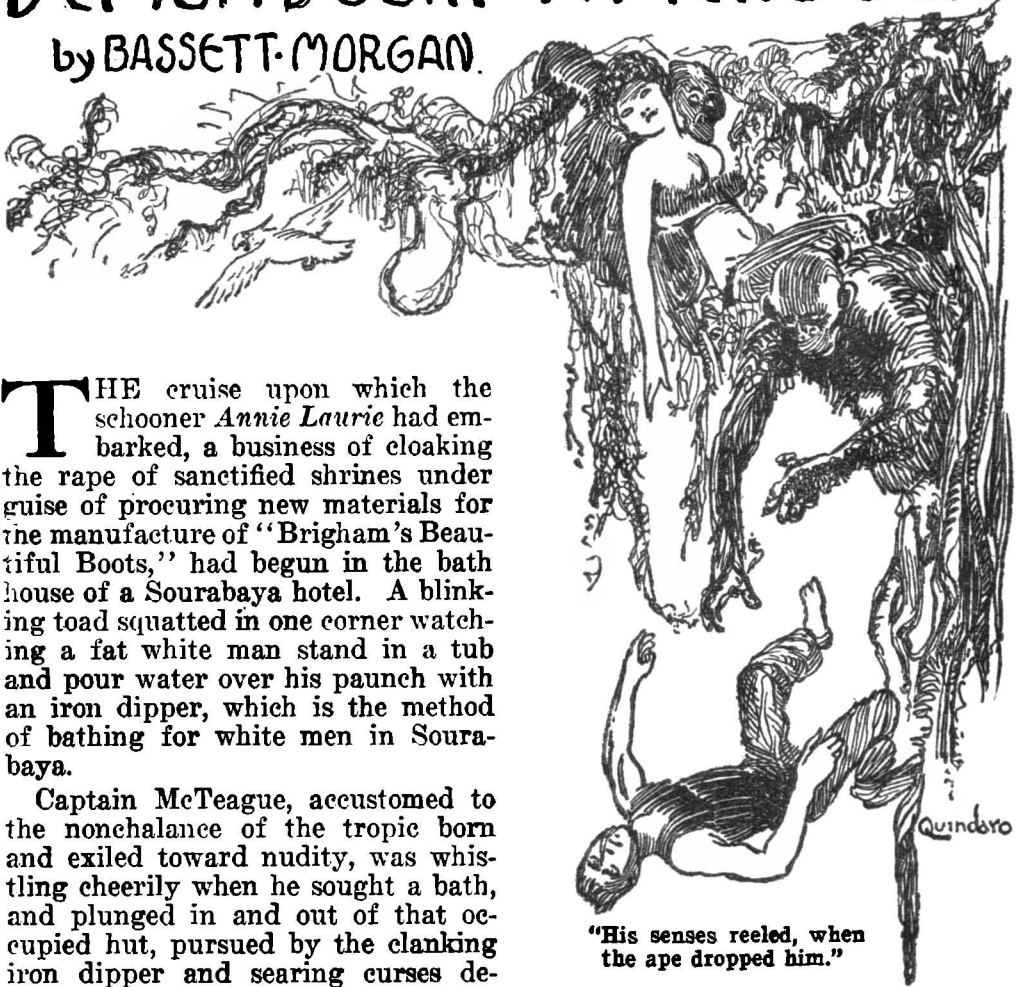
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# Demon Doom of N'Yeng Sen

by BASSETT MORGAN.



"His senses reeled, when the ape dropped him."

**T**HE cruise upon which the schooner *Annie Laurie* had embarked, a business of cloaking the rape of sanctified shrines under guise of procuring new materials for the manufacture of "Brigham's Beautiful Boots," had begun in the bath house of a Sourabaya hotel. A blinking toad squatted in one corner watching a fat white man stand in a tub and pour water over his paunch with an iron dipper, which is the method of bathing for white men in Sourabaya.

Captain McTeague, accustomed to the nonchalance of the tropic born and exiled toward nudity, was whistling cheerily when he sought a bath, and plunged in and out of that occupied hut, pursued by the clanking iron dipper and searing curses descriptive of his intrusion, ancestry and future. Later, apologetic, he met and talked with the clothed bather, learned that Brigham of Bristol wanted to hire a schooner and crew to obtain the skins of crocodile, cobra, and any other unusual hide that might be made into footgear for women. He wondered if tanned skin of natives would turn out well until Captain McTeague suggested his own hide as a fitting experiment—after which the shrine business cropped up casually because Captain McTeague suspected it from the first. For one thing, he had heard of Brigham of Bristol

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thieving sacred relics and misusing natives. In the Orient, news travels as magic works, without sight or sound or seeming reasonableness. It is whispered in bazars, purred in little jungle drum-voices, inscribed by brush ideograms and carved by craftsmen on objects of virtue as well as bargains of tourist trade. It is very difficult to escape the mute patient pursuance of vengeance which is earnestly laid on the laps of gods of the East.

Captain McTeague did not care greatly that Brigham of Bristol mis

took him for a fool. The man was rich and generous. He had reason to be free with money, and at present the *Annie Laurie* was idle. The bargain was struck, Brigham installed with two beach-comber acquaintances who had an Oxford education and a large thirst and were diplomatic enough to flatter the shoe merchant to their personal aggrandizement, and the *Annie Laurie* steamed out with her deck cluttered with live pigs in wicker hampers, and a crew of brown men of much the same silent inscrutability of countenance but vastly differing ideas of personal adornment.

Two things happened quickly. Young Dr. Tai Hoong, for whom Captain McTeague had vast respect and a speaking acquaintance, had been hired by Brigham, and looked after his health with solicitude deserving a more worthy object. Captain McTeague was surprized that Tai Hoong accepted Brigham's wages. Certainly he did not need money. He was regarded with respect by Chinese savants and educators, with awe by the rest of his world. It was only after thought given to the matter that Captain McTeague connected the presence of Tai Hoong with Brigham's vague mention of a shrine of N'Yeng Sen and a string of jade bells. The *Annie Laurie* was not a half-day out when Tai Hoong busied himself at the crate of wicker-encased pigs, seeking for one whose squeal never ceased. Captain McTeague looked curiously on as a noted Chinese savant set the broken leg of a young porker that had been injured in packing and was destined anyway to be served on the mess table.

"So that's the sort of man you are," said Captain McTeague heartily, and Dr. Tai Hoong's smile was rarely pleasant at the implied compliment from a broad-beamed, rugged sea-adventurer whose fame on sea rims of such singing names as Java, Flores, Banda, Arapura, Molucca and Celebes was as far-reaching as the

scholastic notability of Tai Hoong in other strata of life.

The next enlightening moment of Captain McTeague came when they plowed that dark stretch of sea which he mentioned as the location of the Little Paternosters, and Tai Hoong began softly to repeat in excellent English *The Cruise of the Mary Gloster*:

By the heel of the Paternoster, there isn't a chance to mistake.

And Captain McTeague listened with a feeling of rare enjoyment, and his spine seemed to crinkle when the modulated voice of Tai Hoong reached the close of the poem:

Churnin', chokin', chucklin', quiet and  
scummy and dark,  
Full to her lower hatches and risin' steady.  
Hark!  
That was her after bulkhead. She's flooded  
from stem to stern.  
Never seen death yet, Dickie? Well, now  
it's your time to learn.

It was a bit uncanny to hear a slant-eyed, yellow-skinned, long-queued Chinese recite that Britisher's pæan with such understanding. And in spite of many cruises hereabouts, Captain McTeague had never been able to shake off a presentiment of evil when he entered the mysteriously perilous waters of the Macassar.

He was glad of the company of Tai Hoong in time, for Brigham of Bristol and his companions drank constantly and bestially and were correspondingly seasick and brutal with the little brown seamen and kept McTeague constantly alert for trouble. Also McTeague liked the dignity of Tai Hoong in refusing to hold Brigham's head on occasion, and the Chinese doctor did not hesitate to tell him that drink would undoubtedly leave him a prey to jungle fever fatality.

The Malay crew were in vast awe of Tai Hoong, it was evident. They stepped aside lively when he appeared on deck, showed him a reverence of demeanor and glance that no white

potentate is granted from these men of sea-pirate stock. Even Brigham noticed it and cursed their deference, cursed the white lace jackets they wore, their fantastic millinery and baggy trousers. They constantly spat betel-juice from mouths like casualties. But when the *Annie Laurie* ran into a storm and was driven like a hunted thing through heaving black waters, the Malays shed their bodices and pants and without waiting for commands accomplished the tight-lashing of everything on board with incredible speed.

It was a bad storm. Brigham and his friends crept cursingly to their berths. Tai Hoong remained on deck, evidently enjoying the hurricane, the howling of wind devils between the islands. But McTeague was alarmed for his ship; his stout heart sank when, in spite of seamanship and expert piloting in darkness as tangible as black wool, the *Annie Laurie* was lifted on a boiling maelstrom and dropped on an out-jutting obstacle which the violence of the storm had uncovered. Simultaneously with the crash came the screech of engines running free and jangle of signal bells.

"Broken propeller," the lips of Tai Hoong shaped mutely.

Storm demons shrieked anathemas, called down murrains on puny humans daring to intrude their pallid faces in these islands of dark-blooded conquerables. The blackness was profound. The anchors reached no ledge of sea-floor to which their flukes might cling. Brigham appeared under the cabin light, his rain-soaked pajamas quivering with fat fear until McTeague ordered him below and reinforced his command with two Malays stripped to loin-rags and shining oiled skins, to shut him in his berth.

A few rags of canvas and a sea-anchor were rigged to give steerage way. With their garments rain-molded to their bodies, McTeague and Tai Hoong worked with the crew to fight the *Annie Laurie* off those shores

where in a sudden lightening of the torrential downpour a light flickered. The wind had somewhat abated. The gleam on shore wavered up and down, then rested.

"I'm going below for guns, Doctor," said McTeague. "Have you a reliable shooter, and can you use one?"

He was aware that his crew did not wish to be driven on those shores at any cost, and the sweep of wind and tide between islands invisible in darkness was carrying them toward that gleam of light. Also he was aware that high cliff walls broke the force of the wind and battering waves.

As he strapped on big navy revolvers, Captain McTeague saw by the clock in his berth that it was near dawn, although the storm clouds had prevented a rift of gray daybreak showing. A screech from the deck took him aloft three steps at a time, to a scene of confusion on which the deck lanterns shed lurid stabbing color splashed on heaving tumult of black men in frenzied slaughter.

A fusillade of shots warned him. His guns spat as he came from shelter. Then blackness struck as something crashed on his skull. Captain McTeague felt himself rolling and bumping, then slipping into deeper darkness than in the storm.

WHEN McTeague's eyes opened, Tai Hoong was bending over him with abstracted impersonal attention. He sat on the side of the berth to wrap lengths of white gauze about the captain's wrist. McTeague cursed, partly from pain, partly in recalling the fight on deck and his own elimination in the first of the fray.

"Natives boarded us," explained Tai Hoong, "for loot. They took all that was not fastened. Then they tried to cut the steam pipes. Your steam pressure, Captain McTeague, was excellent. If you had seen how they were cooked alive it would have repaid you for your hand. Not even a savage can fight steam."

"What happened to my hand?"

"They wanted an ornament on one finger and took it with the hand. I selected the shapeliest hand I could find, but of course it will not match your own hand. In a month you should have a serviceable substitute for the hand you lost. And you will observe later that your new hand belonged to a personage of importance whose body the remaining Malays viewed with marked respect."

McTeague swallowed hard and through gritting teeth remarked: "A Papuan chieftain welded on that ring red-hot, and because I didn't squeal I was saved from a New Guinea cooking-pot."

Then his eyes closed. More nauseating than ether fumes was the thought of wearing a native's hand in place of his own. He wanted to tear it off, but Tai Hoong gave him no opportunity. He was in attendance night and day, and later assisted Captain McTeague on deck to take command.

The *Annie Laurie* was beached on a sheltered shore and her crew were working on repairs to her hull. News of the shipwreck had traveled, and natives came looking for trade and straightway caught the interest of Brigham and his two drunken cronies. Captain McTeague paid no attention to Brigham those days. It was not until the schooner was repaired and they were ready to set out, under canvas (since there was no way of welding a propeller shaft in the jungle), that Brigham revealed what kept him sober, interested and busy during those weeks along shore.

The man was boastful, blatant, sickeningly proud of the number of human skins nicely cured, pliant and soft as doeskins. At sight of them, McTeague swore large words, but Tai Hoong was interested, even to the point of drawing Brigham out on the source of supply.

"Native woman," announced Brigham. "And as nice a color now as

when I saw her running into the jungle." He halted abruptly, aware that it was impolitic to confide the details of his selection and bargaining to anyone. Tai Hoong's shapely hands stroked the skin softly. His eyes did not lift; not so much as a flicker of more than casual interest was betrayed.

"Leather, like fur, must be taken from prime animals," said Brigham. "There ought to be a market for this stuff. Seems to me I heard of some woman making her will that her skin was to be cured to make the cover of a book of poems her lover had written to her. Nice little sentiment, that, though a Chinaman wouldn't appreciate the delicacy of it."

"No. Possibly not," agreed Tai Hoong. "The skin is fine of texture, finer than this one, for instance." He held up a second horridly suggestive dark skin.

"Huge giant of a fellow, that one—fought like a tiger before they slugged him. Did no end of damage. But they got even." And Brigham smiled. "Flayed him alive. It's a wonder you didn't hear him yell."

Tai Hoong straightened and rolled a brown paper cigarette deftly. His nostrils emitted streams of smoke. Then he strode forward to where Captain McTeague bent over charts and studied a neat sum of figures.

"I should be glad to confide in you, Captain McTeague, that my reason for coming with you and Mr. Brigham of Bristol was not alone the very high salary he paid me."

"It isn't news to me," agreed Captain McTeague.

"You know, of course, that Mr. Brigham has set his mind on visiting the shrine at N'Yeng Sen. I am interested enough to see that this goal is attempted, at least. And perhaps I could assist you in finding it."

McTeague studied the face of Tai Hoong.

"Something happened," he announced. "I had an idea you were on

board to prevent that booze-soaked fat-head from getting to the shrine. Now you've changed your mind. I'd like to know why."

"The ring on that hand which my poor surgery gave you, Captain McTeague, would enable us to gain entrance to the inner shrine. You may be surprized to know the sea-pirates were led by a man sworn to protect the goddess of N'Yeng Sen with his life. It is possible the hand may cause you embarrassment, but it may on the contrary protect your life. I am sincere in saying that had not my own hands been trained in surgery, which is my lifework, I should have attempted to replace one with that hand, so great and far-reaching is the power of N'Yeng Sen and the *jimat* on the finger of that hand you wear."

Captain McTeague looked at the ring, crude gold, carved in symbols he did not recognize, set with a carved blue translucent stone.

"Blue jade, Captain McTeague, rarer and more valuable than a first-water diamond of equal size."

Captain McTeague impulsively held out the brown hand which Tai Hoong clasped. Then his face changed.

"The damn thing don't shake hands right!" he exclaimed.

"For many years it has used the secret clasp of N'Yeng Sen," explained Tai Hoong. "Do not attempt to train it otherwise."

"Well . . . about this trip to N'Yeng Sen . . ." And for an hour Captain McTeague pored over his charts assisted by the Chinese, whose knowledge of hidden lagoons and dark places on the New Guinea shore was astounding even to McTeague, who had traded there for years.

ONCE at sea again, Brigham drank a great deal and held ribald conversation with Klein and Schartz, the two companions he had brought, in whose company he seemed to feel more natural than with McTeague or Tai Hoong. Captain McTeague ig-

nored much. Since the business of taking cured human skins was done, there was little use grousing. But he was hoping that Brigham would unpack his tricks in company of a band of Papuan savages. He said as much.

"The New Guinea warriors have black skins, Brigham, sort of rich, brown-black skins. They'd make nice foot-gear.

"It's this way," stated Brigham, warming to shop-talk, "I've been figuring the cost of this skin, for instance, and how many pairs of slippers it would cut. Even dance slippers, which take very little material, would come high considering what I paid to take this leather. Gad, I could have bought that woman for a wife real cheap, but her skin came high. Seems to me the best way would be to take wives."

"Regular Bluebeard," suggested Schartz laughing. "Fat wives will make the most boots."

"Depends. If they're flabby fat, the skin is soft in places. Say, I need a name for this leather, something snappy and not a give-away. They'd probably get fussy about human skins."

"Something like Birds of Paradise, eh?" asked Klein. "By the way, they get paradise plumes from New Guinea where we're going. Why not get the real thing there?"

"Too delicate and small for profit," said Brigham. "What about this N'Yeng Sen name? We have fur names like Caracul paws and bellies of unborn lamb. Why not 'Breasts of Paradise'?"

Captain McTeague rose and moved away with a glance of black disgust at the ribaldry which came.

THE first sight of Papua crouched like a black panther on violet foaming seas seemed less menacing than these white men he carried. The fetid breaths of her dank river mouths was cleaner than his human cargo. And Papua, he remembered,

was savage, pagan, immoral and cruel, and for the first time he was glad. The hells of her torture traps could not avenge such deeds as the slaughter of this young Celebes woman in cold blood to make dance slippers for white women. Captain McTeague was all for finding the shrine of N'Yeng Sen speedily and getting shut of his bargain with Brigham of Bristol.

It took time to find the place on that wild northern shore of unconquered Papua where Tai Hoong had said the inland trail might begin. But they did make it and dropped anchor in a lagoon at flood tide, to have shore people presently dart out in black canoes like a flight of arrows from hidden bowmen. And the natives at the paddles, as Captain McTeague observed, were young men who carried a netted bag of feathers around their necks along with adornments of more sinister origin.

"The bag of feathers," explained McTeague, "is a crest of plumes they can wear only when they have killed men. They're friendly enough. Young folks usually are. But they're ripe for trouble."

"Why not kill each other?" asked Brigham.

"It isn't done. They kill strangers or enemies. And we are both. It's only fair to warn you. Nice black skins, eh?"

He beckoned a youth on board, ordered a fizz drink of harmless quality and allowed Brigham of Bristol to admire the oiled black skin to his heart's content. Turning away, Captain McTeague thought he saw the ghost of a smile twitch the lips of Tai Hoong. He hoped so. His own feeling of premonition boded trouble, and he needed a friend as never before.

The offshore wind brought that alluring sweetness of flower-breath transcended by jungle moisture that is the emanations of siren Papua, gripping as the memory of perfume on the hair of a woman beloved. The slumberous blue breasts of Papua

were sunset-flamed and passionate. Loveliness reached out arms and twined fingers amorously in the hair of Captain McTeague. And in the lower shore darkness drums throbbed, pulses of desire, quick stealthy rustlings as the siren stirred to spring on these intruders.

Captain McTeague invited Tai Hoong to go ashore with him and carry gifts to the village chieftain. There was nothing to be gained by holding aloof now. In an hour or so the tide would be low and the schooner unable to escape until it flooded again. A bold front was the thing.

COOKING-POTS simmered over fires that made the night a spotted terror. Old women with flabby flesh moved to serve their lords with shells of turtle stew. Captain McTeague saluted the chief and wished he could secure the finest crest of Paradise plumes he had ever seen a chieftain wear. He remarked about it.

Tawauyo was rather spiritless for a savage, he thought. The whole tribe were lacking that suspiciousness and formidable resentment which must usually be overcome before trade begins. And only when McTeague mentioned that they would like to penetrate the hills to the shrine of N'Yeng Sen, did Tawauyo rouse from apathy. The sudden blaze of aged eyes showed a tender spot touched. McTeague gathered that Tawauyo greatly feared the god at N'Yeng Sen. Debbil-debbils sprang from his loins; they haunted river and jungle, thieved pearls for the goddess-wife in the shrine, and made life not worth living. If the white men were going to N'Yeng Sen, he, Tawauyo, would take their big canoe for his own, because never, never would they come forth to sail it away.

Sympathetic and unsmiling, Captain McTeague announced that he would make white magic and drive out the debbil-debbils. But his offer was met with a shrug of weariness.



Tawauyo had seen white magic which was very good for women and children. He had journeyed to a port and secured a box of it. That also had been stolen and at times the jungle flared with the magic lights and grew noisy with white magic worked by debbil-debbils. Possibly they were white-man debbil-debbils, since they acted strangely as white men did, and danced to the sound of tunes in a box which all white men carry. To the questions of McTeague in pidgin and Tai Hoong, who revealed his amazing knowledge of tribal jargon that night, Tawauyo said that life was scarcely worth living for his people. They dared not penetrate mazes of jungle rivers for terror of crocodiles that talked, or hunt on shore for fear of gray men of the woods who were half man anyway and acted as if only their strength was beast and in all else they were men.

The returning canoes, bearing Brigham and his cronies, put an end to the sorrowful complaint of Tawauyo. Drums purred and a dance was started: fermented palm juice added its potent fire to the lash of drums, beating, throbbing, purring into wild thongs of sound that seemed to leave weals on the flesh of McTeague. He saw black men leaping in demoniacal ecstasy, and Brigham of Bristol absorbing palm wine and ogling a young woman on the outer circle.

"Easy there," he cautioned. "We'd better be going, Chief," he apologized to Tawauyo; "a white man gets foolish on strong drink."

"Maybe buy wife," suggested Tawauyo. "Heap fine Mary make for wife catchem hut." A woman in the bleaching-hut, confined until her skin would be the color of smoky gold. And Brigham had heard.

"Trot her out," he demanded.

"None of that," roared Captain McTeague, but Brigham was striding after an old woman commanded to show him the bleaching beauty.

"Time to head for the schooner,"

McTeague announced, and enforced his command. In the boat Brigham ranted about the woman in the bleaching-hut until McTeague restrained an impulse to knock him overside for sharks to finish—for the lagoon held sharks. He mentioned his craving and Brigham laughed and began to howl a song—a maudlin music-hall ditty, but a fair baritone voice.

It was scarce ended when from the dark shroud of jungle gloom along shore, as if echoing Brigham, came a wide-throated roar of song, like a thunderous organ diapason gone mad:

"Maxwelton's ba-anks r-r-r booney," it howled, then broke into speech: "Na-amin' a ship fer-r-r A-annie La-aurie. . . ."

Then McTeague knew that the nightmare of a sickness that had once plunged him near death's door had not been a fever dream after all. That voice belonged to Red Murphy, a waterfront bum who served time for murder. And he and Tai Hoong and Brigham of Bristol had blundered into a lagoon haunted by the most terribly punished criminals the world held.

Worse than Dante's Inferno was this sentence of doom passed on Red Murphy and his pal, Tricky Turner. And this was the debbil-debbil worrying Tawauyo. McTeague wondered if it would not be an act of mercy to end the doom of these two criminals. But he did not speak of it. For one thing, Tai Hoong was listening with alert interest; the other three white men were drunk, too far gone to question the leather quality of that jungle voice lifting a love song.

HE LAY awake in his berth for some time recalling vague memories of his sickness some years ago and the very bad dreams it brought. Then he decided it might be better to start at once for the open sea, give up this shrine business, and get out.

When sleep came it was heavy, dreamless, profound. He overslept,

wakened to find Tai Hoong in his stateroom for the first time since his hand healed.

"Something strange has happened, Captain McTeague. We are prisoners."

McTeague raced on deck in his pajamas. Then he cursed. The lagoon mouth, a narrow entrance between out-jutting coral reefs, was impassable. Jungle trees and brush, weighted by tinted coral newly brought from the sea-floor, effectively formed a barrier that would have to be cleared before the schooner could sail.

Long and earnest talk went back and forth between McTeague and Tai Hoong, and the Chinese at last prevailed.

"The weather is changing; the monsoons are just begun. A big storm would clear that barrier and we could sail away. Meanwhile I greatly desire to visit this shrine, and you would make it possible."

"How?" demanded McTeague. "How do I figure?"

"Your hand!"

McTeague looked at that shapely brown hand, slender beside his own, marked with the curiously carved blue jade in a ring of red and yellow gold.

"Sort of 'hand of fate,' eh?"

"A hand of destiny. Perhaps judgment. Or doom. One might invent many titles, Captain McTeague. I prefer to believe its power will rid the world of evil—a sort of demon's doom."

"Nice hand that," commented McTeague, flexing the fingers. "Why do you suppose those natives worked like sluggers all night to hold us in this lagoon?"

They were not to wonder long. Arrangements went forward to take jungle river trail to the shrine of N'Yeng Sen, and McTeague went ashore to obtain canoes and guides. The matted mangrove roots embedded in shoreless river banks prevented the use of the schooner's small power-boat. And

they needed guides. Brigham and his cronies were still drinking, but they followed McTeague ashore and were invited to soak further in palm wine. The drums again pulsed forth their primal martial call to valorous impulse, but Tawauyo would not consent to lend guides or canoes to disturb the presiding demon of N'Yeng Sen. In fact, like an animal sensing storm long before a barometer begins its fall, Tawauyo was uneasy.

He kept on his feet, constantly peering into the jungle gloom, listening for sounds which the drums might deaden. And toward sunset, when the hills were smoldering in thunderous gory crimson, the avalanche swooped—rustling in the blackness beyond fire-flare and leaping dancers—a crashing that rushed at the circle.

McTeague's guns were knocked from his hands as they cracked. He was lifted bodily and swept through lacerating palm fronds and twisting lianas and thudded breathless over the crook of a tall tree branch to twist and recoil in horror from his captor.

A gray man of the woods, an orang-outang, clutched claws through his belt, lifted his two hundred pounds with little effort, grinned, then mouthed guttural semblance of human speech.

"Saw me afore, didn't ye? Tricky Turner's me name. An' I'm sick of bein' a monk."

McTeague's brain reeled. He was sick with fear and horror. Blackness floated him to semi-consciousness, but a vigorous shake of those powerful simian arms roused him to the fetid breath near his face, the great jaw fangs that could rend and tear his flesh, the paws that could split his body as a banana is peeled.

Then he was again lifted and swung through the air, turning, fighting, twisting vainly to free himself, and at last plumped down in a stinking stretch of river mud that reeked of the sickening odor of muggers walk-about grounds and putrid remains of

feed. Crashing through the trees came a second gray terror and down came Tai Hoong in the arms of a great she-ape. In ten minutes they were joined by other apes, each bearing a human burden, and the screams of Brigham of Bristol were silenced by a blow of an ape's double fist which drew blood from his blue-mottled lips. Thereafter, for the space of many minutes, silence reigned.

Sunset glow penetrated the clearing in flickering color. A strange company even for a tropic jungle stared at one another. Gray-faced white men, the yellow countenance of Tai Hoong a sickly green, the grinning circle of apes in charge, and along the river shore dark water split to reveal the long black snout and murderously fanged jaws of a crocodile.

"Ha-ail, ha-ail, the ga-ang's a-all he-ere," sang from the pink leathery throat. "R-re-mem-ber Po-o Su-ung tha-at ma-ade us wha-at we a-are. Here's whi-ite men tha-at ca-an do a-anything. Gi-ive us ba-ack o-our sha-apes."

Captain McTeague remembered. In his sickening fever dream the terrible Po Sung had glutted vengeance on humans, transplanted their brains to this saurian and some orang-outangs. Now, he knew the nightmare had taken flesh and blood, and caught him in its insane power. A maniacal fear lashed his blood to frenzy. He spoke as a man might who howls at nightmare fury to depart.

"Go on, kill us, only do it quick. We are not Po Sung. He is dead as hell. Why torture us? We didn't harm any of you."

"No. But ye'll do us go-ood. Ye'll fetch anoo-ther like Po Sung an' gi-ive us ba-ack our sha-apes."

Half fainting for the first time in his life, McTeague glanced at Tai Hoong. The Chinese eyes flickered; the green skin had regained its normal yellow.

"I have studied under Po Sung," he said. "But you would not care to

emerge in the body of a slant-eyed yellow-faced Chinese?"

"Na-aw," roared from the mugger's throat. "They's just two av us to bo-other abo-out. Tri-icky an' me-e. The gals is na-ative an' so's the o'other buck. Spe-eak up, Tri-icky, whi-ich wan'll ye cho-oose?"

"Not de Chink," howled from the throat of the ape which held Captain McTeague fast. "Dis bloke suits me."

"Captain McTeague is a guardian of N'Yeng Sen," said Tai Hoong. "Also I shall need help with this work. A third reason is that he is the only one capable of sailing his ship to a port. You will want to get away from the jungle, of course."

McTeague saw that Klein and Brigham lay limp, inert. And Schartz was in a stupor of fear. None of the three understood this terrible doom impending or the hell circle formed in the jungle, where powers of darkness loosed by a fiend in human form had gathered for vengeance too terrific to contemplate. There came a time when gathering darkness, the miasmatic stench of swamps, the nauseating filth of the walk-about ground crowded McTeague until he was hardly aware of what went forward, except the voice of the mugger endlessly howling argument and the quiet, controlled speech of Tai Hoong, playing a desperate game for time, for life.

He knew only that presently he was lifted, swung through the jungle, with lianas clutching and dragging at his feet, and hunched in the circle of fires deserted by the natives, piled high by the jungle ghouls. There, a gourd of palm wine started his blood again and the icy clutch of fear about his heart retreated. Reason mounted its throne and he understood many things.

The mugger had left his river and lay basking on the heated coral and an ape poured wine down the great pink gullet. They were like trained servants for Red Murphy the mugger and Tricky Turner the man-ape, obeying commands, fetching, carrying, al-

most meekly subservient. And once in the silence as the mugger pondered something Tai Hoong had said, McTeague caught a moan. His head came up. The mugger's long black snout turned. The apes listened.

"Fetch ut he-erc," commanded the mugger, and an ape swung into the blackness beyond, then returned carrying something that mewed in agony, and laid it on the coral.

McTeague leaped to his feet. The hand of his guardian ape circled his throat and held him. Then he threw up an arm to shut out the sight of a girl who had once been pretty, skin bleached to color of gold ash, head like a feather duster, who had been staked down and was being flayed alive.

McTeague crowded back against the ape that held him, oblivious to the terrible proximity of the beast, and in one flood of rage that shut out all other fears, he turned on the rousing Brigham.

"Is this girl your work, Brigham?"

"Didn't have time to finish," muttered Brigham; "Klein and I just got started. Good taxidermist, Klein—lovely skin that girl——"

"Tai Hoong," roared Captain McTeague, "you once gave me a hand—a hand of doom, of demon's doom, you said. Give me one sign that there is justice in this world, or power in man to rid the race of its brutal fiends aborted from human shape. Give Red Murphy what he wants, and Tricky Turner, and this other ape!"

And somehow the form of Captain McTeague in his torn shirt and bloody scratches of flesh took on majesty and height and the strange hand was uplifted in that gesture which ancient gods of the East make in stone and bronze and golden effigy.

And across the circle of firelight Tai Hoong rose and became stately and terrible, as his hands clasped each other and he bowed from the waist as before god-head.

Then, in the jungle formed a procession of dreadful import such as the

world has not seen since the armored apes of the simian city of Hanuman pranced forth to savage music that abused the senses, and jangled towers upthrust against the burning sky.

McTeague stalked forth, followed by his captor whose claws were hooked in his belt. Tai Hoong followed with head carried high and eyes ablaze. And swinging along came the miserable humans jerked like rag dolls in the clutch of the gray apes. Along the river bank they went, so that the mugger could more readily keep pace, and from his throat roared the sonorous sounds that called to mind a black-plumed hearse and following charger with saddle and stirrups reversed; the Dead March from *Saul*.

Swinging through trees overhead were a company of orang-outangs carrying gourds of palm wine and other things which McTeague could not make out. It seemed to Captain McTeague that his body was detached, separate, insensate. One burning furnace of wrath roared behind his eyes. For alongside, as if designed to flaunt the wickedness which white men did to natives, came a she-ape carrying as lightly as a woman carries her baby, the half-flayed body of the hut-bleached girl, still moaning, although her eyes were glazed and Tai Hoong had muttered the only comforting thing his lips uttered in that hour, that she was beyond feeling pain.

Deep into the jungle they plunged, and Captain McTeague saw the beauty of that pre-Adam period when survival depended on brawn, on fang and claw and stupendous strength. They could not have made that journey in weeks of hacking through jungle growth or paddling the trackless, shoreless rivers webbed with mangroves that sprout their seeds on the trees and send down roots to web the water with entangling death snares. But in the arms of the great apes they were carried high, swiftly, safely, and always within sound of that booming

Dead March roared from the throat of the mugger.

Paradise birds dancing on tall tree-tops in the early sun of dawn soared like living jewels. Lorries flashed furious color, squawking raucously as they winged from this procession. Captain McTeague looked down on river shores blazoned with profusion of monstrous scarlet flowers whose hot perfume seemed potent as chloroform. His senses reeled, his body was limp as a rag when the ape swung down and dropped him like a sack on a clearing walled by dense dark jungle. His breath rasped like dead husks, but he was aware that the gray ghouls had arrived with their human burdens and the swampy stream now ran limpid and green-shining through gardens, and was arched by red lacquered bridges that glowed in the moist heat like jewels. Against the hot blueness of a sky sailed by cloud argosies, towers stood like candles, dripping reflected light from plaques of porcelain and lacquer. Green bushes ablaze with bloom shielded its lower story.

**A** MOMENT later an exhausted, sweating Tai Hoong came from his ape captor to McTeague.

"N'Yeng Sen," he announced.

Gourds were passed, and McTeague swigged thirstily and knew the beneficence of wine dulling fear, rousing courage; and he needed courage. For a company of apes came from the direction of the temple, jacketed in shining metal tunics, swinging with the precision of soldiers, although they flew rather than marched, but their flight did not disarrange the long stream of ghouls that stretched from the surrounding gardens to the jungle edge where McTeague and his company waited.

"Now, Captain McTeague, you take command," said Tai Hoong. "Your hand——"

"Lord," breathed McTeague, involuntarily lifting the strange hand to have a look himself at this member

which Tai Hoong had called "Demon's Doom." And the oncoming gray ghouls saw. A yelp from the leader and they halted, their stormy gray lines up-ended with the tail of the line swinging forward to enclose the jungle crowd.

Standing beside Captain McTeague, Tai Hoong spoke words that McTeague could not understand, and from the arms of one ape a figure dropped, toddled a feeble step nearer and disclosed under the limp skin of an orang-outang he wore as a cloak, an aged yellow man clad in jewel-embroidered robe. His eyes were on the uplifted hand of Jock McTeague on which the symbolic ring caught sun-fire and glowed. He spoke, and Tai Hoong bowed from the waist.

McTeague did not learn what passed between these two men of the East, but between wheeling lines of the ape army of N'Yeng Sen they were escorted to the temple gates, guarded by apes who fell back at their approach, and Captain McTeague was aware that the ring on his strange hand opened these gates, and the shaven priest who met them at the lower step found in that hand-grip which McTeague could not change or control, some "Open Sesame" which cleared the way.

The next hour was one of such relief that McTeague neither knew nor cared whether he had fallen into a death trap or the trail of life. He was bathed, his body anointed and massaged. He was fed and clothed in robes of blue silk embroidered with designs of gold thread and gems. And he slept. The moon shone through the round windows of the room where he lay on a satin-padded floor mattress, and a white-robed attendant was setting sparks alight on incense, and offering him a cool drink.

Somewhere, there was murmuring sound pulsing like music. He ate curried chicken and rice, drank deeply of the tart, cool liquid offering in a gem-encrusted chalice, and was pres-

ently crowned with a gaudy head-dress on which jewels quivered from gold wires. Then he was led through dark corridors lighted with smoky torches in wall sconces to a vast room where moon-silver poured through round wall apertures and wall torches lent lurid flares of flame. He wanted to shrink along one wall in his ridiculous robes and bonnet of jewels, but there was no choice. Through gray apes crouched on the floor in their metal jackets he was led to a distant dais that seemed a shimmering blaze of light. Coming closer he saw that the shining wall was made of dancing-girls in metal cloth dresses who stood motionless as statues, flanking a group of shaven priests in resplendent robes. To stools below the priests he was led, and Tai Hoong appeared from somewhere to sit beside him. Below was a couch draped with a white gauze pall under which lay something human. Tai Hoong spoke softly, whispered from unmoving lips.

"Judgment is taken from you; this white man has killed a woman destined to be a dancer of N'Yeng Sen, belonging to the gods. The Doom of N'Yeng Sen will fall."

The music he had heard came nearer, swelled, pealed through the hall, and the wall of dancers suddenly swooped into motion. For an endless time McTeague watched the posturing slow dance of the East until he grew drowsy-eyed and the light-footed woman creatures in their gleaming robes seemed butterflies wheeling drunkenly. Then a single gorgeous whirling flame of dancing flew down, spinning like a diamond top until it seemed that human strength could not keep such mad motion. McTeague closed his eyes.

When the music ceased with a crash of cymbals he looked again.

The priests descended. There was a stir forward, and before that covered couch came apes of the jungle, dragging three white men. The white pall was lifted and McTeague sick-

ened at the sight on the white couch. Arms of smoky gold folded about a small red orchid of that genus along the river which poured forth its lethal breath. Her pretty face framed in dark curls as bushy as a feather crest lay the girl of the village bleaching-hut. And from her waist down was revealed the hellish cruelty of Brigham, the expert skill of flaying her golden skin.

It was Tai Hoong who acted as interpreter for the priests. McTeague realized that Brigham was either drunk or drugged, for he turned braggart again, threatening Tai Hoong with the authorities of the ports, casting the blame for the work on Klein, making the excuse that they had not killed her, and the jungle trip was to blame.

The pursuit of Eastern vengeance earnestly laid on the lap of gods is long and patient, but the judgment of N'Yeng Sen was swift. For the benefit of Brigham, Tai Hoong translated.

"Some time ago great surgeons made the successful experiment of transplanting brains of humans into the skulls of apes. Po Sung, who was once a power in this temple, used a river crocodile. We have seen them, heard them, and know they are unhappy in their present incarnation. It is the judgment of N'Yeng Sen that these men have expiated their sentences for deeds not as evil as the outrage of this girl destined for the god-dance of N'Yeng Sen. It is the sentence of N'Yeng Sen that Brigham of Bristol and Klein the taxidermist change physical form with Red Murphy and Tricky Turner. I have spoken!"

And at that judgment of doom, McTeague leaped to his feet to protest, threw up his arms to silence the roar of ape throats that greeted the end of the audience and involuntarily added the finality of the upraised hand, displaying the symbol of N'Yeng Sen.

The hall leaped to life like gray, stormy seas, and as magically clear.

McTeague stood clutching the arm of Tai Hoong to keep his feet, and hearing the screams of Brigham and Klein. Suddenly he remembered Schartz and asked Tai Hoong in one word.

"The brain of the dying girl was transferred to the head of Schartz," said Tai Hoong. "He, or she, is recovering nicely."

Then Captain McTeague fainted.

He wakened in an ornate tiny building fashioned after the towers of the temple, with carved pillars supporting its spire. He was attended and waited upon, served with luxuries, cared for as never before in his life. And it was quiet there. He looked out at endless garden beauties and the far-away blue menace of the jungle wall. He lost count of days, and decided the wine was drugged, because nothing seemed to matter, nor did he care about his predicament or his schooner waiting in the lagoon.

Then one day Tai Hoong appeared, clad in dragon-embroidered black satin, sleek-skinned, suave, quiet-voiced.

"We are free to return, Captain McTeague," he said, "very much the same company in appearance as when we came. Do you feel equal to meeting your passengers for the return trip?"

CAPTAIN MCTEAGUE went with Tai Hoong and met Brigham and Klein and Schartz; a trio somewhat refined in appearance, thinner, paler, pathetically quiet and hesitant. And McTeague decided he had been stricken with jungle fever and imagined the great hall of N'Yeng Sen, the dancers, the judgment, the Demon's Doom, until Brigham spoke in that thick brogue of the river mugger, but a voice no more like the roaring thunder of the swamp night than a drawing-room voice resembles the howling magnified by a megaphone.

"Red Murphy's proud to shake yer hand, sor, and mighty thankful for

meeting you widout makin' a meal of ye on sight—as I did many's the wan. Faith, ye don't know how hungry a mugger gits, and all. . . ."

"The same from me," said the man in the likeness of Klein. "And I'm a deal handsomer nor I was as Tricky Turner, sir, thanks be to you an' the Chink surgeon, sir."

Captain McTeague was mute, struck dumb by the transformation, unable at that moment to comprehend the enormity of joy that made these men tremble as they spoke. He looked at Schartz, who shrank timidly to one side and uttered native words, of which McTeague caught only one, "Marshter," as the woman in man shape dropped and bumped a forehead to the earth.

McTeague turned abruptly. From the temple doors came the ape army in their shining foolish jackets, long columns of gray men of the woods streaming from the great doors, swooping in that airy floating lithe-ness that is the marvel of simian movement, catching up the men, swinging them along, flying high in the upper stratum of forest green, up with mountain beasts and birds over the steaming, perfumed flanks of the dark land.

Down they swooped to a village at noonday meal. Villagers scattered as if blown by the typhoon power and left the cooking-pots unattended. The fires were scattered, the pots overturned, the huts entered and searched for hidden pearls; then the ape army danced, silently, ghastly, grotesquely foolish, a wheeling chain of gray ghouls linked by paws and tails, and from the river swamps came a howling, roaring cry of despair:

"For God's sake, do-ont le-ave me li-like thi-is!"

"Brigham of Bristol," said Tai Hoong.

"And me—in the name of heaven, shoot me, kill me!"

"Klein," muttered Captain McTeague. "Look, Tai Hoong, the for-

lorn ape in the tree. And his body going with us on the schooner, back to God knows what . . . and Brigham's body . . . to Bristol. Tai Hoong, they'd be better dead. What will Red Murphy do in Brigham's shoes?"

A ghost of a smile twitched the lips of Tai Hoong.

"An interesting experiment to watch, Captain McTeague—Red Murphy as the proprietor of Brigham's Beautiful Boots. I think one thing is certain; he will not inhumanly flay living natives for material for women's dance slippers. Perhaps—who knows?—the demon doom of N'Yeng Sen is wisdom of the gods, punishment that fits the crime."

"Then by what justice was I made witness of these horrors?" demanded McTeague. "Prisoned in the lagoon, losing a season. . . ."

It was the ape army that answered his question. They swung to the coral reefs, cleared the debris, working like Trojans, and Captain McTeague took the oars of a boat to pull his human cargo out.

The schooner's deck was empty of black men, who had vanished at sight of the apes. Captain McTeague went below to rout them from hiding in the hold, and the sight of a lantern clutched in the strange hand acted more quickly and effectively than a lash. He followed the Malays on deck,

discarded his gorgeous robe, felt it drop heavily and lifted it to see what caused its weight. Then he gasped.

Those buttons he had not noticed before were pearls caught in claws of gold; there were embroideries of solid drilled pearls; there were pockets, pearl-filled. . . .

And on shore were the apes, standing like soldiers; and as he lifted the strange hand in farewell, their arms were flung high in silent salutation.

"There is an expression in your tongue, Captain McTeague," said Tai Hoong, "about 'angels unaware,' perhaps too sentimental a term to apply to a sea captain. But 'scourge of the Lord' is also unseamanlike. The idea is that N'Yeng Sen has long been searching for Klein and Schartz and Brigham of Bristol. You have been the means of bringing them to the inner shrine and judgment. The Macassar pirates, sent long ago on their trail, blundered, fortunately for us, and gave us the hand of power. You feel that you are repaid somewhat, I hope."

Pearls poured through the fingers of the strange hand as Captain McTeague pondered. On deck the Malays had spread canvas. The tide was flooding; the lagoon entrance clear. And one by one the brown men donned their baggy trousers, their lace jackets and fantastic twisted hats. It looked like fair weather, a good trip to Sourabaya.

