

Strange STORIES

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STRANGE STORIES, published bi-monthly by Better Publications, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Entered as second class matter November 3rd, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Copyright, 1939, by Better Publications, Inc. Yearly, \$3.00; single copies, \$0.15; foreign and Canadian postage extra. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

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KAAPI

*The Fatal Trumpet Blasts,
Profaned By Woman's Eyes,
and a Jungle Spell is Cast
when a Dark-Haired Maiden Dies*

By
**MARIAN STEARNS
CURRY**

*Author of "The House of a Thousand
Loves," "The Peacock Fan," etc.*

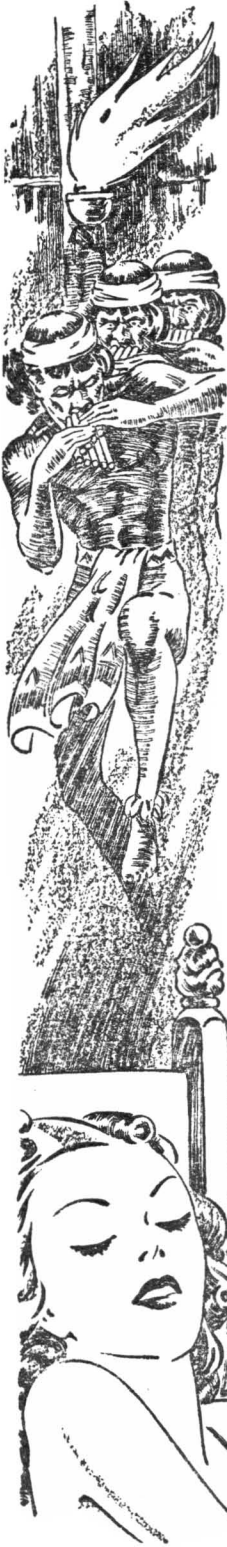
AT THE moment, I might have thought the whole thing a figment of my imagination, had not Hubert's actions proved otherwise.

His grip on the steering wheel tightened so suddenly that the car veered, knocking my cunning new hat into an even perkier angle than I had given it originally, and loosening one of my blue suede slippers. He righted the car, the expression of surprise on his face giving way to another of an entirely different order, his heavy black brows drawn together, the outline of his jaw tense.

Up the winding road, from the direction of the large white house we were approaching, came the controlled, resonant, melodious boom of what was unmistakably a native drum of some primitive people. The strange, rhythmic sound drifted out on undulating ether waves. Something within me responded to it startlingly. My blood seemed to quicken and run more warmly through my veins, carrying with it a barbed sting of fantastic horror wedded to a wild, barbaric joy.

"Hubert!" I cried. "Listen to my home-coming music. A wedding march for the famous traveler's bride. I

I saw it clearly in every detail



didn't know you had a native drum out here."

Hubert brought the car to a halt at the foot of the steps. He turned to me incredulously. "You mean—you heard it, too?"

"Why, yes," I answered wonderingly. "Why not? Haven't you a native drum here?"

Hubert shook his head. With the stopping of the car the sound of the drum had died out. Cold reason told me that we had been fooled by some disturbance in the motor. But later, when there was no motor running . . .

WE had come home. To our first home together. And in the delight of it, I forgot everything else.

We chatted gayly all through dinner, finding it heavenly to be alone together in the country peace and quiet after the noisy adulation of crowds that had followed Hubert about in the city. We had our coffee and cigarettes in the library.

The library is really a trophy room and book room combined. I had, from time to time in the few months I had known Hubert previous to our marriage, seen most of the things he had brought home with him in his years of travel; but tonight in prowling around the room in the fascination of getting intimately acquainted with my new home, I chanced upon some queer looking objects that were new to me. I called Hubert's attention to them. He strolled over and put his arm around me.

"Oh, those?" His eyes darkened. "They are the sacred trumpets of the Waikano tribe of Amazonian Indians. In their native haunts a death sentence is automatically imposed upon any woman who so much as catches a glimpse of them."

"Why?"

"Just because she is a woman. That's out where men are men, and women are cattle."

Hubert looked bothered. He told me afterward that the unpleasantly vivid recollection of the booming of the drum as he had last heard it along the Amazon, knowing what it meant to the Indian girl in his canoe, and to himself, also, if they were caught—

coupled with the sound of it, so oddly out of place in these staid midwestern hills this afternoon as we came up the drive—struck him with fresh force then. There was no drum like that here. Yet he had heard it. And I had heard it. I, who had never been to South America!

He stood looking at them in puzzled fashion, these peculiar trumpets. He was good to see. A fine figure of a man, passing one hand perplexedly through his thick, dark hair.

"These trumpets are the only ones of their kind out of the Amazonian district," he went on. "I promised faithfully when the chief, after great hesitation, agreed to let me have them, that no woman should ever be allowed to set eyes on them. That is why I have never put so rare a find in a museum. Somehow he was the sort of man one keeps faith with, though he was only a savage."

"But that's pure superstition!" I protested, amazed and amused, for Hubert is a curiously hard-headed person. "A promise like that would mean nothing except in their own country."

"I gave him my word," he repeated with finality. "Besides, superstition or no, the trumpets actually do seem to have power. I saw one woman die, most horribly, after she had looked upon them quite by accident. And she was miles away from them at the time of her death, too. An Indian girl, in my canoe."

I looked at him curiously, and resolved then and there to have the whole story some day soon. For there was a story here. A somber one, to judge from Hubert's manner. Fortunately, I had no conception then of the way I was to learn it. I tried to cheer him up.

"I am a woman," I said. "And I've looked at them. And if you think I'm going to die while still so young and so fair, you're going to be disappointed, my dear!" I laughed.

But even to this day, I shudder to think how I experienced all the fear and agony of death, physically and mentally, in the unbelievable aftermath. My joke roused Hubert from his mood, however. He laughed, too,

and kissed my hair, the top of my head being about on a level with his chin.

"You're mine, which makes you immune," he said serenely. "If I didn't think so, I would most certainly have drawn the curtain over the glass of the trumpet case before you came into the room, as I always do when my parties of visitors include ladies."

"What are they for?" I asked, regarding the prohibitive trumpets with a superior air from the security of his arms.

"Each one represents a different jungle spirit supposed to be literally embodied in its one particular instrument. When a man breathes into it, the spirit is roused from dormancy into a living power, and pulsates physically with the one who rouses it. The natives keep them buried deep in the river from one tribal ceremony to the next. I wonder—it is strange that we *both* heard the reverberations of that drum. I never heard it before in this country. And you had never heard it at all. Yet you knew what it was the moment its sound reached your ears. It might almost seem that this thing is definitely connected with your coming here, with me."

"Hubert, don't be silly! It was mental telepathy. Or—or something."

I led him away from the trumpets that disturbed him so, and stopped farther along the wall before some open shelves on which stood some others of his treasures.

"What is that? Poison?"

I pointed to a painted earthen bowl paired with a stoppered bottle containing a brown liquid.

"Why, no. That's *kaapi*, a native drug, or drink. It's from the Amazonian district, too. It is served to men and women alike in their informal dances, and to the men attending the regular tribal ceremonials from which all women are excluded. The ceremony, which involves the trumpets by the way, is called *jurupari*, and is an initiation into a sort of free masonry.

"It takes a native to like *kaapi*, really. And to yield properly to its influence, too. The stuff had no effect on any of the white men in our party. Curious, wasn't it? We all tried it,

and it tasted so bitter I could hardly get it down. I remember one time when the rest had gone on and I stopped alone with the tribe for a few days to get some data on it, the others to pick me up when they—"

Had I but realized it, he had already started to tell me the story I so wanted to know. If he had finished telling it, I might never have found out all that I did find out. For I would not have drunk the *kaapi*.

BUT Hubert was interrupted by a knock on the door. He stepped back to the trumpet cabinet, curtained and locked it, and left the key in the lock.

"Come in," he said.

"Three gentlemen in the drawing room to see you, sir," said the maid.

"Three gentlemen!"

"Yes, sir. They say they are a committee from a London museum—"

"By George! I wasn't expecting them for a week yet!" Hubert was dismayed. "My reports aren't in shape, though all the material is in order—what day is this, anyhow? I must be mixed in my dates."

"Why, it's the twenty-second of September!" I told him in surprise.

We had celebrated my twentieth birthday royally that very day, before we drove down here. He had given me a magnificent ruby pendant, and teased me about being an old man's darling. Hubert, you see, is twenty years older than I.

"September twenty-second! Twenty years ago today I was—"

He broke off abruptly. I saw instantly that the date had a peculiar meaning for him, one entirely apart from the fact that it was the anniversary of my birth. And I know now that our discussion of the trumpets and the *kaapi* had recalled it to him.

The pieces of a very queer puzzle had already begun to fall into place.

"One gentleman said he was sorry to intrude on you so soon after your return," went on the maid, hesitatingly. "But because of illness in his family he must go back to England at once, and will start to New York in the morning."

Hubert turned back to her.

"I see. Of course. Tell them I'll be right down."

He took my hands.

"Well, this is a devil of a mess! The first evening in our new home, and I have to spend it working in the study. I've got to see them, dear."

I laughed, feeling very wifely and heroic.

"That's all right, dear. I knew what I was letting myself in for when I married an explorer. Run along. I'll stay here a while and then go up to bed."

"Stout fellow!" he said appreciatively, and was gone.

THE room was quiet after he left, a brooding, country quiet entirely new to me. I missed the racket of the frantic city streets beneath my windows, missed the clamor of the telephone and the constant, easy chatter of friends who dropped in nightly.

My restless mind turned with tremendous desire to the trumpets again, forbidden fruit being ever irresistible to my sex. Nevertheless, I'll admit that now I was alone with them, I approached that curtained cabinet with considerable trepidation. I hesitated to profane it with my feminine touch, in spite of the fact that I had jeered at superstition before Hubert. But the temptation was too great. I turned the key and swung the door back on its hinges. Nothing jumped out at me.

There they stood in the rack Hubert had made for them, fourteen of those mysterious trumpets, each of a different length. Some were quite small, others taller than I. They consisted of hollow wooden mouthpieces lengthened by rolls of bark and bound together with native rope. I wondered how they would sound when played. The insidious suggestion that I try blowing through one seemed to me to have been put into my mind by Satan himself. It so startled me that I fled down the line of shelves in something closely resembling panic.

My next, and involuntary, stop brought me directly before the bottle of *kaapi*. Was it Fate? I do not know. I looked at the bottle. Hubert had said emphatically that it was not poison, but that it was terribly bitter. To me

the *kaapi* looked like dark beer. I am fond of beer. It would be fun to taste it and see for myself what it was like. The notion grew on me. I had a delicious daring sense of mischievousness. Nothing more. In view of Hubert's own statement I was taking no risk.

Slowly, with all the absurd caution of a child stealing jam, I took the earthen bowl from the shelf and dusted it carefully and fastidiously with my flame colored chiffon handkerchief. With steady hand I removed the stopper from the bottle and poured a little of the brown *kaapi* into the bowl, lifting it to my lips.

I barely wet my mouth with it, having no desire to drink anything really distasteful. The tang of it was strange, but not at all unpleasant to my tongue. I remember thinking amusedly that Hubert probably didn't like beer. I did. The bitterness to which Hubert objected was not apparent. Probably the potency had deteriorated with the passing of time.

I poured out all the rest, all that was left, and drank deeply. My ears hummed. I drank more, casting caution aside. It seemed to me I had found in the *kaapi* something my physical system had craved all my life, unknown to me. I wanted all of it, and I greedily finished the *kaapi*.

It made me a bit dizzy. There was a chair near the trumpet cabinet, and I sat down on it, resting my head against the high back and gazing abstractedly at the sacred trumpets which were immediately in line of vision. As I sat, I was startled for the second time that day, to hear once again the soft, dreamy, vibrant rhythm of the native drum.

I believe that I shut my eyes. I am not sure about that, but I think I did. At any rate, I became lost to all else for the moment except the drum sound, which swelled in volume until the whole place was filled with its delirium, and the drum itself gradually took definite shape before me. I saw it clearly, in every detail, as if I had long been familiar with it. And somehow—somehow I knew it denoted danger. Danger for me!

A huge, hollow log, minutely split the entire length, with five holes along

one side, it swung on cords suspended from four carved, ornate posts and was beaten with two clubs, the knobby ends of which were covered with a crude form of rubber. The drum centered a large building, the high, thatched roof supported by rows of pillars; and the room was lighted by huge, burning splinters of wood stuck upright in the ground at more or less regular intervals, and by blazing masses of pitch daubed on poles at each far corner. There were railed compartments all around the amazing room, each with a smoldering campfire representing the family hearth. Hammocks hung in every occupied compartment, used in place of beds. There was a family assigned to every inhabited compartment.

Little by little the scene sifted into further detail before me. I began to see with some clarity through the smoky haze filling the room, though I felt unreal, as though I were living an ancient nightmare over for the thousandth time. Something special, I did not know what, filled me with a violent, primordial joy of living, while at the same time I was subjected to an almost animal-like fear.

Around the drum, young men with bronze skin and features of Mongolian cast danced in groups of three. Each young man played on a set of bamboo pipes, nine in number, which he held in his left hand. His right hand rested on the shoulder of the man nearest him. Each one, smeared liberally with red and blue paint, wore a girdle of curved, polished bones, a necklace of jaguar teeth, and a strand of polished nuts around his left ankle.

As the pan-pipes shrilled, the rhythm quickened, and every youth stamped heavily with his left foot, his anklets rattling tantalizingly in perfect time to the music. The music itself grew wilder, more eerie. The dancers postured in frenzied ecstasy, stamping and playing, with savage abandon that stirred my own blood into a primitive passion.

I found I was standing in a cluster of young women, attired, like them, in a six-inch head apron. It imposed upon me no consciousness of immodesty. A human body swathed in cloth here

would be a monstrosity, a sinister hint of a deformity that must be concealed. I knew that. Together we struck hands and swayed as the young men danced.

One by one we approached the trio of our own selection, tucked our heads beneath the outstretched arms of the men, and thus linked together, followed pace and steps they set us. Faster and faster we danced! Higher and eerier shrilled the pipes! My head spun. Out of the surrounding gloom one face stood out alone before me.

It was the face of Kandi, the medicine man. He was resplendent in a towering headdress composed of feathers plucked from the bodies of the most beautiful and gorgeously hued birds of the jungle. He it was who watched me every single second as I stamped and shuffled in glorious exultation between the vigorous, sweating young bucks, his beady black eyes glittering hatefully in an otherwise impassive face, flagrantly painted.

HERE, in Kandi, was the materialization of my fear.

Yet there was something more. Something—something was going to happen. I thought about it, searched for it in my mind. I ought to know what it was. I did know. But I couldn't remember.

I glanced across the room to where the men sat, the women being segregated near the drum. In the midst of the men was one painted like the rest, but without native ornament. My heart beat spasmodically, then nearly stopped. It was Hubert, his white body gleaming in the dusk.

Here was the source of my unbridled joy. Kandi was the source of my fear, but Hubert explained my joy. Yet my attitude toward him was humble, almost subservient. I must worship him from afar. There never could be a bond of any conceivable sort between us. And for some reason, incomprehensible, I was afraid for him. Whatever it was that was going to happen, it concerned Hubert. Like most primitives I did not reason. I only felt. Instinct warned me to watch Kandi.

All at once the dancing stopped. From a not remote distance, a strain

of wailing, melancholy music halted us all like magic.

The women who had children snatched them up and joined those of us who had none as we all but trampled each other down in our panic to get through the one broad, open doorway the building afforded. We ran blindly into the forest. Two men herded us before them. Not a word was spoken. The darkness was so thick it was like a hot black blanket. Nothing was to be heard except the thud of bare, calloused, running feet, the sobbing breath of the frightened, awe-struck women, and an occasional whimper from a scared baby that was quickly hushed. Tropical growth crackled against our faces and stung our legs and bodies viciously, as though the jungle spirits were whipping us on before them.

I RAN mechanically, reluctantly. Farther and farther I dropped to the rear. I did not want to go. Desperate as my situation would be if I were to be found, I had to go back! Something was on foot, even now, maybe, in that huge room that presaged trouble. Trouble for Hubert. Hubert! I must get back, at once, somehow. And I must get there in time to do something that was meant for me alone to do. I did not know what it was. I only knew it was so.

It seemed to me that I had once known, though. None knew better than I that it was as much as my life was worth to turn back. But there it was. I must elude the guards, first. That in itself was no easy task, for it was as much as their lives were worth to let one of us escape their vigilance. But the guards, and what happened to them, did not matter. Nothing, no one, mattered but Hubert.

I managed to work my way to the outer edge of the crowd of milling, rushing women, and then when the blacker shadows gulped us down, I left them and crept aside into the bushes. There, with the blood hammering in my ears and my breath bated, I waited motionless until I was sure they had all gone past me, women, children, and the ruthless, eagle-eyed guards.

Only when I was sure they had gone did I carefully, silently set about making my way through the blackness and tangled undergrowth as only a jungle bred native can. Inch by inch, listening every second for a possible pursuer, I snaked my way back to where the forest met the outskirts of the clearing where we lived.

From where I was I could not see into the room, but I knew that Hubert was still there. What were they doing to him? My idol. My adored one. I had to know! But how could I go further without being discovered? Men were posted at the four corners of the outside of the community building so that none might enter, or even approach, unseen. I despaired, and as I sat huddled disconsolately in the brush, trying to scheme, I was trapped.

I saw a formal procession of men coming single file from the river bank, each one carrying a sacred trumpet. Upon these trumpets no woman might look and hope to live. And I saw them! Even the thought of Hubert could not sustain me in that moment. The vision of Kandi's cruel, gloating face swam before my mind's eye, and I cowered low, shutting my eyes real tight and clasping my hands over them to keep them from further sinning. It was all I could do to keep from moaning aloud in my abject fright.

But the damage had been done. I was going to die! Even though my tribe should never know what I had done, I would die, because the jungle spirits would know, and would kill me without human agent. Could Kandi save me? He was in love with me, but no man could marry a woman of his own tribe. According to our laws it was incest. I had known for days that he suspected that I loved Hubert. He hated me for that. He hated Hubert, too. And Kandi was as wicked as he was powerful.

And then I knew! That was why I feared for Hubert. He was in danger because of me, though he did not love me. Naturally not. To him I was just another native woman, all of whom looked pretty much alike. But Kandi did not realize that.

And what could he not do to Hu-

bert under the subtle privileges of ceremonial ritual! The very fact that Hubert was an utter alien laid him liable to anything Kandi chose to introduce into the customary course. For Hubert, together with some native boys who had reached the proper age, was to be initiated into the tribal mysteries tonight. Here was the danger I had sensed, but could not name.

Fear for myself was forgotten. I thought only of Hubert. I panted like a snared animal as I lay hidden in the thicket, my wet palms crushing the branches and leaves as I gripped them and pushed them away in my effort to see what was going on.

The drum began to beat monotonously, the sacred trumpets to yield their sweet, mournful music. The ceremonies had begun. The night blackened yet more, the jungle closed in threateningly about me. The eyes of the jungle spirits were upon me, searching out my shivering, cringing body and mind. I had sealed my own doom. In a few days—the jungle spirits always took a few days to seek vengeance instead of mercifully striking one dead on the spot—they, my people, would find me dead with no marks of violence upon me.

I quieted once more. Well, then, if it must be so, if I was to die so soon anyhow, how better could I spend what little life I had left than in saving Hubert from whatever ghastly fate Kandi had planned for him? Hubert, big, strong, and abounding with the magnetic vitality of eager youth! I knew only too well the things that could, and did, happen undiscovered in the jungle. No one knew better than I!

Once again, stopping every few seconds to listen, I crawled on hands and knees and sometimes on my bare belly, recklessly contemptuous of reptiles and poisonous insects in which the region abounded, to where I could see plainly through the open door of the building.

The deep toned reverberations of the drum rose and fell over me until I felt them like physical blows. In that instant was born my active hatred for the drum. The weird, haunting music of the sacred trumpets rushed

at me furiously, accusingly, buffeting me. Then I became incapable of action of any kind, under the strange dominating fascination of the combined forces. I left off thinking, transported into a wild, perverted ecstasy that took away for the time all physical feeling. I was bodyless, conscious only of a savage, sensual revelry of spirit, of a mad exhilaration, a jungle fanaticism.

THEN a glimpse of Hubert's white body among the bronze ones recalled me with a sickening rush and lurch of the heart to my mission.

All the men were dancing, a different kind of dance from the one I had joined. Great draughts of *kaapi* were being handed around and gulped by strong brown throats. Men were lifted out of themselves in its intoxication, returning oftener and oftener to drink again. The drum boomed, the trumpets played, the polished nuts on the ankles of the men clashed like castanets and glistened in occasional flashes of light. All at once Kandi, standing with imperious, military hauteur by the drum, brought his feather-hung bamboo shield high against his great chest and struck his war-lance, which had a shaft forming a rattle, crashing upon the ground.

Instantly the dancers spread out, arranging themselves in a circle. Into their midst walked Hubert and the young men, the candidates. Each was given a drink of *kaapi* to deaden pain; and each was handed a stout staff upon which he leaned according to the medicine man's instructions. Again Kandi struck his war-lance to the ground. Every dancer caught up a hollow gourd filled with nuts, and with the new rattles shaking rhythmically, they sang in a low chant and stamped their feet. The fitful light played fantastically over their glistening, painted bodies. The savage gleam of their black eyes presaged relishful joy in the spectacle of torture bravely borne. And always they shuffled and swayed and rattled their anklets horribly. Then it began.

Kandi picked up a long, snake-like whip and with it began beating brutally and in time to the weird music,

the back of the first boy he came to. The boy appeared not to feel the lash that brought blood to his young back and left angry welts there. He stood firm, the expression on his face showing an uplift of the spirit. I looked at Hubert. He was clearly unaffected by the *kaapi* he had drunk. *And Kandi was counting on this!*

He was looking forward to seeing Hubert suffer unspeakably, to seeing the blood well and spurt down his white body, to shredding his flesh with his fiendish whip which he plied with all the strength of his mighty arm, and loved to do! Hubert was at the other end of the line, his ordeal to be the last, the cream of this night's *jurupari*.

IT CAME Hubert's turn. Kandi stepped to one side, ostensibly to rest a moment before starting his final feat. But to my horror, I saw the medicine man slyly dip the end of the lash into a tiny jar that stood inconspicuously by an empty compartment. An empty, unfurnished compartment! That meant that no one lived there, that no jar therefore had any right to be there, and that Kandi had it ready and waiting for just this one thing.

No one else had seen him.

Across my mind flashed the recollection of a man whom Kandi had hated, and whom he had publicly whipped on a trivial charge. The beating had not been severe, but the man had died with all the earmarks of having been poisoned.

I woke from my trance into a realization of Hubert's terrible and imminent danger. If I was to do anything to save him, it would have to be done now. Already Kandi moved back into the circle of dancing, stamping, chanting men. My heart almost failed me. Life was so sweet, I did not want to die. But was I not doomed anyway? Alas, yes. I had profaned the sacred trumpets with my woman's eyes. Well, then—

Kandi raised his whip, the lash quivering as it sang through the air, its long length whirling overhead as it gathered speed for the first blow.

Springing to my feet from behind the low line of brush where I had been

lying, and screaming madly, my nerves having reached the breaking point, I made my presence known.

It was enough. Kandi dropped the whip like a shot, the blow spent in mid-air, and started for the door followed by Hubert and the others. They poured out into the night. Even above the playing of the trumpets and the roar of the drum, they had heard me, had known there was a blasphemous witness in their midst. And however much he might have desired to do so, even Kandi would never have dared ignore that warning in the face of his tribal brothers.

After that I became confused. I made no effort to escape. I only knew that Hubert was striding out to me by Kandi's side; that in the miraculously short time it took the sentinels who reached me first, to drag me to the building, the trumpets had disappeared. And then I knew no more until I woke to find myself lying on the hard floor of the empty compartment before which the jar of Kandi's poison had stood.

The jar was gone now. And who would believe me if I tried to tell them truth of the matter? I lay still a moment, then I found sufficient courage to raise myself on my elbow and look about me.

Men everywhere lay in a heavy, drunken stupor. Even my guards, squatting on their muscled haunches in front of my compartment, were sunk in sleep forced on them by the excessive use of *kaapi*, but I could not hope to steal past them undetected.

My heart filled with a new terror. Did all this mean that after all I was not to be left to the doubtful mercies of the jungle spirits? Had my transgression been greater than I realized? Women were never allowed to look upon torture. And there were no women here!

I sank back again, physically sick. Such terror as I had known before was as nothing at all beside that which paralyzed me now.

It was close upon dawn. The breathless quiet of the jungle told me that. A movement, cautious and noiseless as it was, registered on my supersensitive hearing. Hubert and Kandi,

threading a path through the sleeping men, neared my compartment. Without saying a word Kandi gestured toward me, and as by pre-arrangement Hubert picked me up in his arms. At the door Kandi paused and allowed Hubert to precede him to the river, himself acting as rear guard, his hard, alert eyes darting here and there to watch against surprise.

We reached the river. My hopes rose. Hubert laid me in his canoe. I understood. With Kandi's connivance he was attempting to rescue me. But why this sudden concession on Kandi's part? It was no kind impulse that prompted him to do this thing. That I knew.

Then Kandi himself came to me, and raising me until my head rested on his broad shoulder, he held an earthen bowl to my lips and tried to force between them the liquid it contained. But I didn't trust him, and I held my lips tight and turned my head away.

"Kaapi," he said urgently.

I stared up into his eyes. They were gleaming with anticipated triumph, and I saw the evil smile on his face, and knew that if this was indeed *kaapi*, it was poisoned. Poison was Kandi's stock in trade.

I fought him desperately in my fresh despair, but so strong was he that my struggles were as futile as those of a child. Hubert did not intervene. He thought Kandi was offering me a stimulant I needed sadly in my exhausted state and that the medicine man naturally could handle me much better than he could. But I understood. If Kandi could not have me himself, he meant to see to it that no other man should possess me. If Kandi had known that I had looked upon the trumpets, he would not have troubled about poisoning me.

At this point that damnable drum again started up its throbbing. It seemed to be in a deadly humor. My hatred for it burst into a hellish rage. To me the drum was hideous, malevolent, thirsting for Hubert's blood. And mine.

Someone had wakened and found us gone—that was the explanation of the drum. The cunning Kandi might have

arranged that, too. Soon the whole river would be alive with pursuing canoes. If Hubert were caught with me, dead or alive, he would be taken back and made to die a thousand deaths. Kandi expected Hubert to be caught. It was, no doubt, at Kandi's oily-tongued suggestion that Hubert, with the gay, adventurous spirit of youth running riot within him, had agreed to save a girl from death.

Now it was up to me. If we left at once, we might have a chance to escape. But in order to make Kandi let us go, I must drink the potion he had prepared for me. Well, it would give Hubert his chance, and for me, perhaps, be the kinder death. Numbly I closed my eyes and drank. Hubert knelt in the canoe, paddle in hand. We were moving.

THE poisoned *kaapi* made my head whirl, and the dark closed down. With great effort I raised my heavy eyelids for a last longing look at the world I loved.

A blur of light from somewhere hurt my eyes but cleared my head a bit. Had the villagers caught up with us already, torches in hand? Then my sight focused.

Dazzled by the light from a shaded lamp a few feet away, I found I was lying on the davenport directly opposite the sacred trumpets in the library that were still brazenly displayed to public view. Hubert was standing at my feet, bending toward me as he had been in the canoe. Only, of course, he had no paddle in his hand.

A man with a short gray beard and wise, kind eyes behind spectacles was holding me in one arm, my head raised against his shoulder, while he forced black coffee from a cup into my mouth. I knew without being told that this was a medicine man of our civilized world, a doctor. On the table were the empty glass bottle and the earthen bowl, mutely telling an eloquent story to those who had eyes to see.

Later, when the doctor was gone and I was feeling quite myself again except for a splitting headache that Hubert laughingly called my hang-

over, I went through the whole nightmare with him, feeling that I would never dare go to sleep until I had done so. Hubert sat on the side of my bed, holding my hand, and listening gravely.

"It's all nonsense, of course," he said reassuringly, but he was disturbed all the same. "But I wish I had put those trumpets away. They bring bad luck wherever they are. And they bring disagreeable memories, too.

"You see, everything you have told me, insofar as it comes within my personal knowledge and experience, even to Kandi, the medicine man, happened to me just twenty years ago this very day. I have no knowledge of the Indian girl, other than that she was watching the *jurupari* rites, and that it was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that she had seen the sacred trumpets. These same ones in that cabinet yonder, as a matter of fact. She died before we got to the next village. I always suspected that the medicine man, rather than the jungle spirits, hastened her death. Possibly with the *kaapi*."

HE looked down at me broodingly from under his half closed lids, and smiled.

"You are taking this too seriously, dear. What really happened this evening is that, although drugged and apparently dead to the world, you were mentally receptive. Your subconscious mind registered so vividly

the description I gave the doctor as he worked over you after I found the empty *kaapi* bottle, that you thought you lived the story."

But I shook my head and said slowly:

"That doesn't explain everything, Hubert, by any manner of means. You don't know a thing about why or how she risked her life in order to watch the *jurupari* rites, do you? Well, I do! I can feel every phase of it, right now. And if we were back along the Amazon, I could lead you directly to the community house, and out along the route we took in the jungle when we heard the sound of the sacred trumpets!"

I could not repress a shudder, and the palms of my hands were cold and wet with remembered fear.

"I was born on the night the Indian girl died, perhaps at the very hour," I whispered. "If there is such a thing as the transference of a soul to another body—of course you couldn't marry an Indian girl. But it may well be that it was meant for her, and me, to have your love after all."

Hubert laughed, reaching up to tug at my hair.

"And Indian girl, with fine, yellow curls? I'm afraid I lean to the doctor's opinion that you were drunk on *kaapi*."

But Hubert himself had said that *kaapi* did not affect white men and women. And the fact remains that to this day I sometimes have an almost uncontrollable desire for it.