

# Weird Tales

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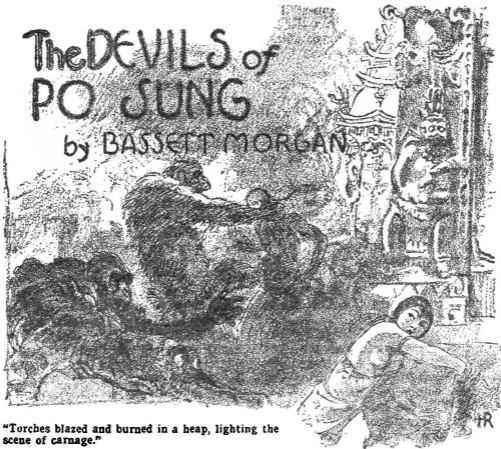
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# The DEVILS of PO SUNG

by BASSETT MORGAN



"Torches blazed and burned in a heap, lighting the scene of carnage."

**O**F ALL wealth abounding in Papua for the man who risks its myriad perils and keeps faith with the under-dogs of trade channels by which pearls and Paradise skins flow forth, Captain McTeague preferred pearls. He was a connoisseur and could state at sight and with remarkable accuracy the natal place of a nest of pearls. On the somewhat sketchy charts of tortuous outlines of the evilly lovely black sphinx of the South Seas he had painstakingly marked the location of more prolific sources of those translucent drops of tinted glory, and the finest came from a lagoon on the north coast guarded by an unspoiled, therefore indomitable tribe under the rule of Tukmoo.

In ports which splash the transient whitewash of civilization on the Papuan sea rims, it was said that Tukmoo's warriors had never met defeat; that as sorcerer, Tukmoo devised ingenious tortures that were the envy of his rivals; that he it was who punished infidelity of women by having them devour facial features of their lovers uncooked and sliced from the living victim, who was staked to the ground, and both were sentenced to the dreadful palm death which takes days of frightful agony, within sight and sound of each other.

Captain McTeague did not doubt the tales told of Tukmoo until he enquired for pearls from old Quong Yiek, the Chinese who got them in exchange for alarm clocks, beads,

printed silks and tin dippers, and the old trader cast the first shadow of suspicion on the hitherto gleaming hellishness of Tukmoo's intrepidity.

"Tukmoo no got. Long time he no got. He ver' sick in his liver for why he no got. He say heap debbil-debbil have got lagoon. He make plenty magic but no can do drive out debbil. Me no savvy. Maybe go look-see."

When he went north to Sarong for gum-dammar, it would not be much out of his course for Captain McTeague to investigate for himself the reason of the dearth of Tukmoo's fine pearls. McTeague headed his schooner toward that red mark on his chart which designated the best pearl lagoon known from the Curlews to the Solomons.

Starting with a sulfur-yellow sky and dead calm from which the wind moaned as it arose and lashed the Banda Sea to fury, a storm drove him from his course and delayed his arrival. With the gray seas still pursuing in hump-backed fury, McTeague saw another craft storm-harried as his own but making remarkable speed in the tail of a typhoon which had kept him on deck for forty-eight hours. She was slender and rakish, black as the hells she came from, with lurid storm-red flashes of light on her pugnacious brass guns. She seemed to be headed for some harbor until McTeague hove in sight, then she veered about as if on patrol. When he drove in closer there was a burst of white smoke, a low "boom" and the scream of a shot ricocheting too close for risking a second aim of her gunner. Captain McTeague promptly turned tail, cursing his own carelessness in not learning more about the debbil-debbils which put fear into the heart of the dauntless and devilish Tukmoo. That grim streak of a craft fast swallowed by coast shadow was manned

by oily Mascats, head-hunting Dyaks and God alone knew what mixture of human wolves; but any and all of them merely spineless innocents compared with their master, who had made his own name the terror of the Banda.

McTeague knew as much as any other man about Po Sung. He was a Mongolian tainted by the worst of other strains of heritage. He spoke excellent English, was suave in company of Europeans and had so huge a grasp of trade that he was a valued confidant of port merchants and diplomats for some years while he perfected his own sovereignty in hidden realms of wealth. Po Sung was like a giant octopus with tentacles reaching to every compass point. Now that he was growing old he had brazenly disdained the guise of decency and took his true colors, secure from vengeance in some backwater shelter where he devised and executed his schemes unmolested. Captain McTeague wished he had not run across Po Sung.

He would have headed out and away only the storm had strained his schooner and snapped off a few spars and he needed to seek shelter and make repairs, especially as the barometer which rose promisingly had suffered a relapse, presaging a flashback of storm.

At sunset, luridly furious behind the crouching black spine of Papuan hills, he headed the schooner into a lagoon and dropped anchor and was not surprized to be wakened shortly after he turned in by drums of the jungle talking in purring spurts and long tattoo rolls. His arrival was being broadcast by black men in the same manner in which their forebears had communicated news of the epochal upheavals of world inundation, the sunken Lemuria and Atlantis. The night was pregnant with menacing growl of drums, and a grimmer dawn poured opalescent

light over a lagoon alert with darting canoes, slender as arrows, heralding the arrival of the sorcerer Tukmoo.

AS THE sorcerer's canoe shot alongside the schooner, McTeague saw that Tukmoo wore a necklace of pearls large as his finger ends, strung between human incisor teeth. He was plumed and painted, covered from forehead to heel with blue lace of tattooing beaded with cicatrices. A scarlet loin-cloth supported a club knobbed with human knuckle-bones. The forty paddles stabbed the water as one, and McTeague was wondering (since there are but two in a set) how many incisor teeth went into that necklace, when Tukmoo reached the deck, and planting his prehensile-toed feet firmly demanded in fairly fluent pidgin-English, strong drink.

McTeague obliged with watered brandy further weakened by grenadine sirup with a chaser of coffee. He had blundered into a lagoon usurped by Tukmoo when he was driven from his heritage by Po Sung. He regretted the cruise and again wished himself far away.

"O Chief, I must make repairs to my boat," he stated. "How come you no longer guard the pearl lagoon to the south?"

Tukmoo spoke wily words of wisdom. He had the advantage of acquaintance during youth and young manhood with a zealous missionary and at the good man's death from old age had absorbed (according to his belief) wisdom of his heart, which Tukmoo ate roasted. He related a cause for deserting his pearl lagoon which was difficult to translate into pidgin. Captain McTeague shortened the tale for his Swede mate, Okey, when he announced that he would go ashore with Tukmoo.

"Okey, Po Sung has got the pearl lagoon. He's loosed a few extra fine devils and scared the giblets out of

Tukmoo. I don't understand the details, but Po Sung has a flock of red devils on the river. They sound like man-eaters, whether bird or beast I can't make out. The muggers speak words. The apes chin-chin in native lingo. The land is bewitched. I suspected a phonograph, but Tukmoo has one he got from Quong Yiek and knows better. His son sailed in to lick hell out of Po Sung and turned up missing just when he was ready to marry a girl all nicely ripened in the bleaching-huts. Tukmoo is ready to make bigger magic by torturing this girl, only we happened along in time to fall into the mess, and I wish to God that typhoon had piled us on the Curlews before we ran in here. Tukmoo demands that I go and make magic that will drive out Po Sung, since his own monkey-tricks have failed. There's no choice about it, Okey. I've got to go or they'll make potpourri and Irish stew of you and me and the crew. Get me my box of parlor tricks and Bengal lights and pack in a dozen sticks of dynamite with fuses and caps. If you hear me fire two shots twice in succession be ready to grab me and run for deep water. If I don't come back the schooner is yours, Okey."

"You ban damn fool to go," commented Okey. But already Captain McTeague felt the thrill of high adventure beating his blood to foam as the drums in canoes spoke to drums on shore of events going forward.

THE stilt-legged huts of a comparatively new village were fresh-thatched and clean. Women stirred cooking-pots over beach fires. Beside Captain McTeague swaggered a black boy, Tao, carrying the box of parlor magic over which he was appointed guard. It was the first time Captain McTeague had been in league with black men or broken his wisdom

of neutrality in thirty years of trading. He assumed an arrogance he did not feel as he sat at the feast of roast sea-turtle, scraped coconut cream and stewed fish washed down with fermented palm-juice. Strolling about the village afterward he saw the bereaved mother of Tukmoo's lost son Tawa, her body painted in white stripes, her hair matted with filth in token of mourning grief. He also saw old women guarding the bleaching-hut, and caught a glimpse of the bride, who stuck out her head and gazed for a long minute at this white man who came to fight Po Sung's *debbil-debbils* and avenge her lost lover. She was pretty as a doll, with hair like a curly feather duster, and skin bleached to creamy copper. To McTeague she called a greeting, "Halloo, Tuan!"

Tukmoo's rage was sudden. He yelped a command and the girl's shrieks shrilled through the village with the sound of a whip.

"Are you having that child beaten?" he demanded of Tukmoo.

"Not enough to injure her comeliness, because if she is not killed for a *debbil* feast, I will sell her to a big-bellied Chinese trader," explained Tukmoo.

McTeague knew the folly of interference, yet he hated the sound of the whipping, and played a bold game for a man in the power of savages whose aspect could change from friendliness to yelps of blood-lust in the twinkling of an eye.

"You are wrong to punish the woman just now," he said. "She will prove a help to our magic if she is told she will be taken with us so that her liver, hot with love for your son Tawa, will smell out the place where he is kept prisoner."

Tukmoo was impressed by this reasoning and yelped a rescinding command. The shrieks of the girl changed to quiet sobbing. The whip-wielder leaped from the hut and the

girl was flung, sobbing hysterically, to the doorway, where she looked down on McTeague with tear-streaked face and eyes like brimming golden pools. He wondered if her evident adoration of him as her deliverer might be turned to account in getting himself out of a perilous predicament.

TUKMOO commanded a day of feasting. By night the *lagi-lagi* house held sodden harvest of drunken and overstuffed warriors, and Tukmoo slept with his head on the stomach of his oldest wife. McTeague, who dined and drank sparingly, prowled through the deserted village and halted beside the bleaching-hut, where a rift of moonlight splintered by palm sabers twinkled on the face of the girl at the door. Near by drowsed the young Tao with McTeague's box between his legs.

In a long day of scheming and planning escape by the river McTeague saw his first chance of success. Laying a finger on his lips for silence, he beckoned the girl down the notched log from the hut and touched the sleepy Tao, who started, snatched up the box and stood ready to accompany the white sorcerer.

McTeague pointed to the river and a canoe hauled on shore. It was slipped soundlessly to the water and the three took their places with the girl in the prow. McTeague understood the awe of his magic box which made them obey unquestioningly. Tukmoo ruled by fear of his cruelties, and the white sorcerer was greater than Tukmoo. In the face of that appraisal of his powers, McTeague did not dare command Tao to head for the lagoon and schooner. He was compelled to make some sort of farce of laying Po Sung's devils, for a cry from Tao would arouse the village and turn the moon-silvered peace to red slaughter. He saw regretfully that Tao headed the canoe inland on the black waterway.

They had not gone a half-mile when in the din of droning, humming, clacking insects came a sound which made the girl gasp with fear and held Tao's paddle dripping as he paused to listen. It was like a voice speaking through a muffled, rasping megaphone. McTeague's skin was prickling as he distinguished words, disconnected and maudlin, as if a drunken sailor mouthed a booming sea-chantey.

"Blo-ow... ma-an do-o-own, o-oh blo-ow tha ma-an do-own." It was repeated and followed by obscene curses.

"Walk-about land, *Tuan!*" whispered the girl who crouched at McTeague's feet.

"A white man in the jungle," he stated with conviction.

"Debbil-debbil!" came a low mutter from Tao.

McTeague watched the river for a canoe. Moon-silver, frail as a spider's spinning, crinkled on the black flow which upheaved. The long head of a crocodile lifted and it seemed to McTeague that from its wicked jaws came a water-smothered repetition of "Blo-ow the man do-own." Then it sank and bubbles broke. The canoe shot forward under frenzied paddling, and in its wake the mugger again lifted his snout and gaping jaws.

"Da-amn Po Su-ung." came a hollow growl answered by a cackle of raucous laughter from the jungle which made McTeague snatch the revolver at his hip.

"Orang-outang," he said as a tree branch released from the clutch of the mighty "gray man of the woods" crashed. Again came that outcry of terrible mirth and he saw the gray shape, a lighter shadow in the gloom where the moonlight quivered through shaken palms.

"The joke is on you, Red Moorphy," came a deep-chested growl. "Ye hated wather. It took Po Sung

to make ye loike ut. Why don't ye find pearls yerself? Pearls! Hell, they got us in this mess. Made a mugger o' you an' a monkey o' me."

Red Murphy! McTeague knew that name. It belonged to a drunken loafer and thief who had served time for killing a Chink trader in pearls. But he could not credit his senses as he heard a jungle voice attribute the personality of a river mugger to Red Murphy.

The canoe leaped like an arrow down the stream, but the gray man of the woods kept pace and the crocodile followed. A patch of shelving shore denuded of vegetation gave off a sickening stench. McTeague was thankful the walk-about ground was temporarily deserted of saurians. At his feet the girl quivered and her teeth chattered. His hair rose in contagion of fear as the moonlight entered a less dense patch of jungle vines where the big ape swung by one foot peering at the river. Again arose that soul-shattering human laughter ringing through the night.

"Wan more white fool," came the guttural cry. "Go on, you bloody idiot! Po Sung'll take yer brain an' sell yer dried head, an' feed yer carcass to his orchids. Like he did to Red Moorphy an' me. God... God... like he did to us fer wantin' a few pearls..."

A scream from the girl contracted McTeague's nerve sheins. From behind the leathery throat of the saurian moaned a booming "Meat—whi-ite me-eat. Ec-at. Dr-rink an' be-ee merry."

"Lave 'em alo-one," growled the ape. "I'll have company when Po Sung gits 'em. Don't fill yer leather belly wid white ma-an. Here, have a nut." There was a thud as the hairy gray arm swung and a coconut hit the mugger's jaws, which snapped shut. Then it lunged on shore, the crooked-fanged jaws snapping in vain at the ape which swung just out of

reach and shrilled curses as it pelted the armor-clad mugger with coconuts.

McTeague stared. He pinched his own flesh to make sure he was awake. Glancing at Tao he saw sweat pouring down the oiled black chest of the native and the gleam of his eye-whites as he strained every muscle to out-distance the river horror.

Through the overhung river channel resounded the crash of water beaten by the powerful tail of the crocodile, its booming curses of port drive origin, the thuds of coconuts on its scaly length, the horrid shrieks of the ape's mirth as it denuded palms of their nuts. The river bobbed with them. The roar and scream of the combat was like thunder, silencing the rasp of insect clatter and hard breathing of Tao. McTeague thought he should soon awake from this incredible nightmare. He assured himself it was the ravings of delirium, but the finger-nails of the girl cut his flesh as she clutched his legs in her terror.

"Catchum white-man chin-chin," she quivered. "Make magic, Tuan."

The river turned. The walls of matted lianas shut the sound of combat farther away; then only did Tao slacken speed.

"Debbil-debbils," he groaned. McTeague thought of the feeble frauds of parlor magic in the box shoved toward him by the girl, simple tricks he had brought to fight such magic as he never dreamed—dread, incomprehensible black magic. Had Po Sung trained an ape to speak, a crocodile to talk? He could think of no other explanation, yet that mockery was dissipated when he recalled the words of the ape and its reasoning. This was no parrotlike repetition of words, nor would Po Sung be likely to teach jungle beasts English curses. The terrible Mongolian had invented a new hell into which McTeague plunged, and in that hour his only resolve was to sell life dearly

but to die rather than fall into the power of that arch-fiend.

The swish of branches near by roused him. In the waning moonlight of the hour before dawn, he saw a second gray shape swinging along and slowly whimpering inarticulate sounds resembling native lingo. The girl stiffened as she knelt, her hands clutched her round breasts and her cry aroused McTeague's pity.

"Tawa," she moaned, "Tawa chin-chin . . . talk-talkee."

McTeague felt his hair prickling his scalp. The canoe drifted as Tao was frozen by fear. There was the drip-drip of the paddle held in air.

"Tawa, Tawa," called the girl. The ape ceased muttering, then clutched a mat of lianas and swung closer, peering down at the face of the girl now gray-yellow in the frame of bushy curls. There came a scream that curdled McTeague's blood. The hairy arm shot out and caught the girl's hair, and she was lifted from the canoe to twist slowly and struggle feebly until McTeague's gun cracked. Came a howl of pain as the hold was released, the girl slumped in the canoe and the ape streaked into the jungle. The canoe leaped forward.

McTeague let the girl lie in merciful oblivion. His own blood congealed at the horror of this demon-haunted domain of Po Sung. Behind them came the fighting mugger and first ape, and they dared not attempt to turn back.

GRAY dawn sifted over moon and stars. Through densely matted lianas McTeague saw patches of pearl-tinted sky and caught lurid gleams of scarlet flowers which breathed a fetid scent as repulsive as the walk-about grounds of crocodiles. The shore was a mass of orchids, with black throats and quivering stamens of yellow, which climbed the branches of gray trees and dead ropes of vines. A bend in the river hid them from the



ape and mugger. The canoe navigated a stretch of stream walled by the furious scarlet of orchids that seemed to announce the master-hand of a gardener planting them like ruddy cliffs along the black flow of river shadow.

When the sun spread gold on the upper reaches of the flower wall, McTeague observed the orchid petals quivering and folding in elongated bulb-shapes of dull yellow. The river widened into a pool, smooth as a mirror bordered with fern and feathery nipa palm. There was lurid and ominous beauty in the place, a menacing and maddening tumult of scarlet orchids of gigantic size, with petals five feet or more in length, their dusky black throats shading to maroon purple. The stamens stood out like knobbed wands thick as a man's thumb. The stench was breath-taking, overpowering, disgusting, yet when he commanded Tao to land he met vigorous protest.

"Catchum die," chattered Tao. He dropped the paddle to scoop water in his palms and suck at it noisily. McTeague snatched the paddle and sent the canoe shoreward. Its prow shoved aside the ferns and he thrust a foot to test the pool rim for a landing foothold, balancing his body with arms outthrust. Instantly the nearest giant flowers lunged forward and he was shocked to helplessness as the great petals wrapped about his bare arm with the cold sensation of serpent scales, yet repulsively flexible and soft.

Paralyzed from amazement he felt himself pulled from the canoe to flounder breast-high in the pool, the petal grip on his arm tenaciously supporting his weight. His arm pained as if constricted by a tourniquet. Tao's screech roused the girl, who first recovered her wits and snatched a knife from Tao's belt. McTeague was trying in vain to tear off the orchid petal. His senses reeled from

the anesthetic stench of the orchid throat and he was only vaguely aware that the girl slashed loose gray sections of petals, the veins of which took strength to sever. He slumped into the pool over his head and came up, to clutch at the canoe stern over which he was hauled.

Tearing the petal fragments from his arm he felt the stab of pain, and blood spurted from the pores of a swelling red band. McTeague was horrified with fear of virulent poison. He jabbed his knife into the flesh and sucked vigorously, spitting into the pool as Tao sent the craft from shore.

As the canoe drifted near shore, McTeague saw the orchids move forward on their stems like gorgeous beast-heads craning toward a glut of meat. The whole wall was alert and in motion, lunging out, waving giant flowers to and fro until he could see the supporting jungle trees dead and bleached to the tops. He knew the vampire orchids of the jungle, but never before had he seen such huge ones, or animal greed so voraciously displayed. Adding to horror, the pool narrowed again to river width, arched overhead by the terrible scarlet flowers. It was like the red throat of a medieval dragon yawning for victims.

McTeague turned from the sight and observed a singular phenomenon at the pool. As the sun rose and its hot light gilded the topmost flowers, their petals jerked reluctantly shut, folded into bulb-shaped buds. At his command the paddle halted. They waited until sunlight flooded the pool and the shore was hung with leathery yellow bulbs. The shaded river yielded more slowly to the all-powerful sun. The canoe went on, and as if sentient, aware of meat near by, the tips of petals unfolded like tigers' tongues. There was the sound of creaking and rubber stems writhing like serpents. The sun had worked one of its myriad miracles, but it did

not penetrate into the scarlet funnel more than a hundred yards, where McTeague faced low-hanging scarlet horrors that swayed forward, greedy for prey.

Again the craft was halted and McTeague reached for his box, then busied himself biting caps and fuses on sticks of dynamite. His right arm was swollen to twice its natural size and almost useless. His lips were hot and dry as in fever. The flower stench was terrific and making them all drowsy.

Yelling to Tao to back the canoe he tossed a stick of dynamite at each river shore, and they were drifting on the pool when a deafening roar crashed. There were tearing and slithering sounds. The river roof seemed to lift and a backwash of water rocked their craft.

For some moments debris rained down, brilliant bunches of feathers that had been Paradise birds and lories, ragged tatters of orchid petals, nooses of lianas, then the scarlet wall seemed to subside and float on the water surface, a bridge of vegetation over which McTeague assisted Tao to shove the canoe into sun-drenched water beyond.

To his incredible relief, McTeague breathed cleaner air than the stinking fetidity of the orchid pool. There was clean salt breeze from the sea and tang of ebb-tide which cleared his brain of the poison that stultified his senses. But they faced peril ahead, for as the river turned he saw the tip-tilted cornices of a dwelling built like an old temple of Cathay and knew they approached the house of Po Sung.

Much as he dreaded a meeting with that terrific personage, there was no choice. He hoped his wits and obvious blundering into the place would prove his innocence of intent to thief pearls. He was too well-known to drop out of sight without enquiry and trouble for any man who held

him prisoner. All in all, even Po Sung was a more endurable alternative than a return by the river. Yet his nerves tautened as he saw cultivated gardens, and a long pergolaliko bridge spanning the river, completely covered at the far end with the scarlet orchids folded now in yellow buds.

Small channels had been cut from the river, and one of these they followed to a small pool. Red lacquer bridges arched the little streams. The sea-tang was stronger. There were hedges of fragrant ylang-ylang and frangipani, glimpses of orchards and growing plants in prim array, white crushed-coral paths, coolies in wide hats moving about, stone steps of a landing-place which caught McTeague's breath and gaze.

A TALL form in a robe of saffron yellow awaited them, its hands folded in green-banded sleeves. Captain McTeague looked into the grim black eyes of Po Sung.

"Welcome." He spoke in suspiciously bland tones. "I do not often have visitors, Captain McTeague."

His eyes darted like black quicksilver from McTeague's head down his bleeding arm to his river-wet trousers and boots.

"I heard your salute. My servants came running to report a breach in my orchid wall. I did not expect you to dynamite a way to my poor house, Captain McTeague. Why not have come by the sea?"

"No doubt you know the reason, Po Sung. Your boat took a pot-shot at my schooner yesterday. I had no idea of visiting you, but when I put in to make repairs, Tukmoo decided to detain me. I've had a bad night trying to get away and got a caress from your loving orchids. Could I trouble you for some permanganate?"

"My poor house is at your disposal, Captain McTeague."

He followed Po Sung up the path,

with the girl close at his heels. Tao was sent to white-washed huts of coolie workers. On the porch of the house, copper-screened and shaded, McTeague fell into a sea-grass chair and snatched at the tall glass of cool liquid brought by a Dyak servant. He was exhausted and his eyes closed.

When he wakened he was lying on a soft mattress, clad in silk pajamas, and his wounded arm was wrapped with gauze. Light from a horn-sided ceiling lantern showed him a sleeping-room with no other furnishings than his bed and a blue jar of scentless hibiscus along one wall. He was troubled by far-away moanings and yowls from the jungle, as if the great gray men of the woods howled their hate of Po Sung.

Then again he slept and awoke greatly refreshed. The Dyak boy brought a tray of food, highly spiced chicken curry, fruit and rice wine. Evidently Po Sung lived in luxury in his hidden haven. McTeague decided that the tales told of the Mongolian were too luridly flavored by superstition. A devil he might be, but he had extended gentlemanly hospitality to Captain McTeague.

The Dyak boy shaved McTeague and trimmed his bronze beard. He was shown a coral-lined swimming-pool, where he bathed and donned pajamas of heavier silk and thick-soled sandals, returning to the porch where Po Sung sat waving a womanish fan of carved ivory and kingfisher feathers.

"You slept well, Captain McTeague?" he enquired.

"Splendidly, thanks to you, Po Sung."

"I am honored. I feared your rest would be disturbed. The big apes were noisy and my servants worked with torches in the garden. However I am free today to entertain you. No doubt they came for pearls."

He clapped his hands, and the Dyak boy appeared with a lacquer box and

placed it on McTeague's lap, then opened the lid. McTeague gazed on such magnificence of pearls as he had never seen, ran his fingers in their glory, poured them from palm to palm, then realizing that his eyes too much reflected the greed he felt of such wealth he resolutely snapped down the lid and motioned the boy to take them away.

"The sight of them makes me want them, of course, but I only *trade* in pearls, and so far only through Quong Yick, who told me that Tukmoo no longer held this lagoon. I came to learn why he let it go, and I fell into his clutches. He took me prisoner and demanded powerful magic to fight your debbil-debbils. I brought my parlor tricks and dynamite. What else could I do? Tukmoo had me where he could force me to do his bidding. Then he had a big feast, and while he was drunk and asleep I came away with Tao the black boy and the girl who was to have been the wife of Tawa, son of Tukmoo. We were pretty badly scared at the apes and muggers on the way here and drifted into the orchid lagoon. I blasted my way through."

Po Sung caressed the silky black mustache which dripped like tar-streams from his upper lip.

"Tukmoo's son is braver than the sorcerer. I admire such courage in youth and have made him independent of the blacks, who are stupid pigs. But it is a pity to separate two lovers, so I was pleased when you brought the girl. They shall be united."

"That's mighty decent of you, Po Sung," said McTeague impulsively. Then, as he saw the basilisk gaze of those black eyes and the sneering smile of the cruel lips, his heart missed a beat. "You mean what you have just said?" he faltered.

"I speak the truth, Captain McTeague. In a few days you shall see for yourself. Meanwhile I should like

to show you some of the magic I have worked here, and the growth of an orchid bulb planted only last night. Come!"

McTeague followed him toward the pergola arching the river. It was still in shadow and the scarlet orchids wide open at the jungle end. At the near approach, thick green stems thrust rosy tips from soft, loose earth. Po Sung's yellow hand pointed, and McTeague saw the stems stretch higher, growing inches as he watched, putting forth buds, and twisting through the bars of the trellis.

"Marvelous, Po Sung. You are another Burbank."

"Again I am honored by your praise. The wild orchid devoured only insects and birds, but under my gardening it is perfected to a man-eating flower fed by blood. It is a hungry thing, Captain McTeague, and only for the foolish assaults of Tukmoo's warriors, the river walls would not have flourished as they do. I planted those bulbs in human carcasses, as this one was planted last night."

McTeague's body jerked. His head came up slowly until he gazed into the terrible eyes of Po Sung.

"You planted a bulb in a human body last night?"

Po Sung nodded.

"Did I not say that I have decided to unite Tawa and his bride? Tawa is now in the jungle. I heard him chattering to you as you came up the river. I hope your shot did not maim him. Tawa's body feeds this full-grown orchid across the bridge. His brain is in the head of a gray man of the woods."

"God in heaven!" breathed McTeague. "You mock me with lies."

Po Sung smiled. His black eyebrows arched.

"You shall see and believe. You are not the first man to doubt the power of Po Sung. One year ago two thieves stole in from the sea. One

of them supplied brains to a river crocodile, the other is a gray ape. They were companions in crime, but always fighting. They still fight along the river shore, a most amusing sight, as you must have found it last night."

McTeague felt the tropic heat choking him, yet cold sweat rained down his face. He stumbled over the coral paths as he followed Po Sung to the house and through doorways he scarcely saw, with the smell of chloroform growing stronger, until he stood in a room with white cement walls, a skylight overhead, fitted like a hospital operating-room. Under the open skylight was a huge iron-legged cot, to which the body of a she-ape was strapped, its head swathed in bandages. Two Chinese were clearing away the evidences of surgery, and one of them spoke to Po Sung in accentless English:

"She is doing splendidly."

"The bride of Tawa," announced Po Sung, pointing to the ape. "My assistant, Dr. Feng Chu."

McTeague heard no more. The floor seemed to heave and bludgeon him. He had fainted.

FOR time of which he had no means of keeping track, McTeague lay on a porch couch, waited on hand and foot by the Dyak boy. Po Sung and Dr. Feng Chu, he learned from the assistant surgeon, were away in the yacht. Po Sung left orders to show Captain McTeague every respect and tell him the casket of pearls was a gift. It was advisable not to attempt to return to his schooner until Po Sung's arrival. The gray apes were troublesome lately.

They troubled McTeague. At night he heard the raucous mirth and mournful calling of Tawa, and saw the ghoulish man-shapes in the starlight. The she-ape in the surgery was also noisy, moaning piteously, and mouthing queer sounds quite different from ape-chatter.

It seemed to McTeague he was still in feverish delirium. He did not want to escape, had no power to attempt it. There were books, but he would not exert himself to read. Wandering about the grounds, he noticed the new orchid had attained a prodigious size and was already beginning to bloom. Mingled with his waking dreams were thoughts of two vampire orchids rooted in the moldering flesh of Tawa and the girl, and their brains in the heads of jungle simians.

There came a day when the assistant surgeon led the she-ape to the grounds and chained her to a tree, where she squatted as inert as McTeague on the porch. He wondered at her limpness until the Chinese told him she was under opiates to keep her quiet while her head healed. Then it flashed to the mind of McTeague that, like the ape, he was being doped. No other explanation accounted for his spineless indifference to his fate. A healthy fear intruded on his half dreams. He was being held for some sinister purpose of Po Sung, and like a fool he had supinely endured.

"Where is Po Sung?" he asked the Chinese.

"You have heard of a remarkable trained ape belonging to a scientist in Java, perhaps? Po Sung hopes to bring it back and turn it into this jungle as a companion for Tawa and the other experiment on the pearl thief, McMahan."

"I have seen pet monkeys freed among their own kind," said McTeague slowly. "The wild monkeys kill them instantly."

The Chinese did not answer, for the she-ape had roused and was leaping to the length of her chains. The tree shook with her vigorous attempts to free herself.

"Now she shall have her lesson to avoid the house when she is at liberty," said the Chinese. He went into the house and appeared again with a whip of long thin lashes barbed

with metal. Watching his chance, he swung it at the she-ape. McTeague hated the cruelty of that performance, the furious suffering beast with her blood-red eyes, the streaks of blood spurting from her flanks and the cold-blooded Chinese lashing with all his strength. His own blood boiled, raced, lashed him to fury that combated the dope he was now certain had been fed him in the spicy curries at mealtimes.

When the ape sank down quivering and exhausted, the coolies rushed forward and unshackled her, and again the lash sang through the air and lifted tufts of skin. With a bound she was up and staggering uncertainly away, to disappear over the bridge into the jungle. The Chinese coiled his whip and returned to the house.

That day McTeague scraped his food into a towel and hid it under his mattress, then wandered to the gardens and ate fruit. Already he felt lighter, freer, but his nerves ached for the sedative. He realized a new peril, a craving for opium fed him, that would be worse than slavery unless he escaped at once. But he did not know how closely his movements were guarded.

He returned to the porch. The assistant surgeon was talking to a coolie, whom he dismissed. He asked McTeague to come with him to the surgery, where he filled a hypodermic needle, then laid yellow fingers on the white man's arm.

"No you don't," exploded McTeague. "You've doped me long enough. Po Sung won't use my carcass for his devil-orchids unless he kills my brain first." His fist shot out, caught the point of the yellow jaw, and with a screech the Chinese doubled up on the floor. McTeague heard running feet and slammed shut the metal door of the surgery just as yellow men lunged into view. The bolt rang home. He had barricaded himself in the cement-walled room with the unconscious yellow man.

FOR a few moments he felt a huge satisfaction, but it passed as the Chinese stirred. He hauled him to the cot and strapped him with bonds that had held the she-ape. Then he mopped his sweaty face and considered. From the open skylight he heard sounds of some alarm. The yellow men had thundered on the door, then departed. Using a small ladder, he climbed to the roof opening and looked from the tiers of roofs down on the domain of Po Sung, the sunset colors on the gleaming lagoon and sea, and he saw there the rufous black yacht whose guns had fired on his schooner. Po Sung had returned.

News of his return agitated the servants, who darted to and fro with flaring torches. Then McTeague saw the cause of their excitement. On the orchid-twined bridge two gray shapes swung, and the closed flower bulbs bobbed like elongated balloons on strings. The river water was stirred by a lashing black tail, and in the rapidly gathering night gloom sounded the booming curses of devils which Po Sung had created, roused now to fury against the arch-fiend.

A fierce, unholy joy filled the breast of Captain McTeague. Below him the yellow surgeon heaved against the binding thongs of the cot. A dancing light low down on the lagoon told of Po Sung's small boat leaving the yacht. He would enter the waterway and meet the rage of his victims, and from his high perch McTeague could defy them all, Po Sung, the mugger and the apes.

No, not all, for a third wavering gray ape came over the bridge, fangs bared in a horrid grin, frightening the torch-bearers back to the house as she advanced. In the smoky light McTeague could see the raw-edged scar about her head which bandages had hidden that day. Her screams were piercing and pitiful, her scrambling weak and uncertain, but she was fearless, for behind her stalked the

man-apes; tremendously powerful, long arms swinging to their feet, and before that terrible sight the coolies retreated with wild screeches, slamming doors, moving furniture against all openings.

Up the river bank crawled a glistening black length of scaled ugliness, with jaws snapping.

McTeague heard the sound of ripping and tearing, the furious scream of the simians, then blood-curdling cries. He saw a glare below where the she-ape tossed torches in a heap to blaze and burn, lighting the scene of carnage. He saw human forms, broken and twisted, hurled from the porch, and strips of bamboo walls tossed on the fire. Then he knew his own peril. Sooner or later the apes would slaughter every living thing, tear the house to shreds and break into this surgery. He looked down at the bound yellow man on the cot. This was no time for petty differences.

"The jungle apes are killing the servants," he cried, "and burning the house. We are trapped up here, and Po Sung is on his way by the river to meet a doom he deserves. I'll confess I'm a coward right at this minute. I prefer a shot to that death. Is there a gun within reach?"

He dropped down and unfastened the bonds, then pointed to the ladder, which the Chinese mounted, even climbing out on the roof to look over its edge.

McTeague heard him cry out, a despairing shriek of terror. He leaped up the ladder in time to see a gray shape squatted on the roof dangling the miserable surgeon by one arm and swinging him back and forth. Suddenly her hold broke. The Chinese twisted in the air and fell to the ground, quivered, and then lay still.

McTeague looked into the gleaming red eyes of the she-ape. He had no weapon, but below were cases of sur-

gical knives, his only defense now, his only chance of suicide to escape worse. He dropped from the skylight and his fist crashed into the glass of a case, his fingers fumbled in the darkness among queer contrivances, but none of them knives. He dashed to another case, guided by the faint luminosity of glass, and crashed through it. Then the faint starlight and fire reflection were blotted out. The skylight held the she-ape, and she had dropped inside and sat on the ladder peering at him. He could see her gleaming eyes, hear his own breath sobbing in his throat as his hands fumbled for knives and found only small probes, useless to fight that huge gray death.

He was flattened against the wall beside the case, a fistful of sharp probes ready for the lunge, when he heard her muttering in piteous efforts to control the vocal mechanism of the thick throat.

"*Tuan*," she muttered, "*Tuan*;" and swung down from the ladder with an arm outstretched. He felt the claws touch his arm gently, and stroke his flesh.

**T**HEN for McTeague blackness fell. He was vaguely aware of being swung in giant arms and feeling a cool wind in his face. His eyes opened. He lay on the upper roof, with the arm of the she-ape holding him firmly. Below, the fire leaped and the sounds of savage destruction went on, but there were no cries of fear now, only the guttural curses of the ape McMahan and war-cries of Papuan jungle uttered by Tawa. Turning his head, McTeague saw the light on the yacht's dingey coming down the river.

"Look," he muttered, and his arm pointed. The she-ape turned.

She saw and understood. In another moment McTeague was seized bodily and swung in air as the she-ape swiftly descended by the tiers of

pointed roofs until he was dropped unhurt on the earth. Seizing him by one wrist she ran with him toward the river, where black gloom of trees hid them effectively. There McTeague, still held by his captor, saw the dark swirl of water where the mugger dived. He saw the boat sweep on under the dip of oars, to its doom.

There was an unheaved bow lantern, cries in the night, and the lashing of the mugger's tail, the snapping of its terrible jaws and sea-oaths from its dread throat. Later, a limp, dripping figure crawled to the bank. McTeague could hear its gasping breathing, and the she-ape leaped forward. He was free.

He waited until the she-ape seized that creeping victim escaped from the mugger, and her cry summoned the man-apes, one of whom carried a brand of flaming wood. Its light shone on the yellow face of Po Sung, distorted now by terror he had so often chiseled on faces of other men. McTeague saw the she-ape clutch the long ends of his mustache, curl them about her claws and drag Po Sung by his mouth toward the pergola.

Then he turned away at the dreadful cry that broke. The three apes were tearing Po Sung to bits and stuffing them into the orchid bulbs.

On the river the dingey floated. McTeague darted toward it, plunged in, dragged it to the shallows and secured a floating oar. He glanced back at the river bend and saw the apes flinging bits to the gaping jaws of the mugger. Then he sculled for life toward the lagoon.

A cry from Po Sung's yacht hailed him, but he paid no heed. One man could not catch McTeague on that night of fear, and the others of the crew were staining the black river water with their life-blood. A gleaming stretch of lagoon entrance beckoned to the sea, which was quiet, star-silvered. It was the time of ebb-tide,

an evil hour in Papua, but Captain McTeague was beyond feeling, beyond thinking, horror-drugged, fear-driven, possessing the strength of a maniac as he sculled the boat north.

HE DID not remember coming to the lagoon where his schooner lay, but the mate told him later that they saw him standing in the boat, swaying from side to side like a drunken man, and through the glass they recognized Captain McTeague.

There was a tremendous feast the day after his return. Tukmoo and his warriors wakened the jungle echoes by their drums. Captain McTeague lay oblivious, and Okey the mate did the honors of the occasion, standing guard over the deck cot where McTeague lay prone, exhausted, weary to death and fighting nightmares.

"You ban wan great man, Captain," Okey explained later. "Tukmoo ban brang pearls off Po Sung.

Debbil-debbils ban gone now. How come?"

Tukmoo had raked over the wreckage of Po Sung's house and found the casket of fine pearls. It seemed a trifling reward for laying the debbil-debbils of Po Sung, but Captain McTeague only shuddered and closed his eyes.

"Haul up the mud-hooks and crowd on canvas," he said to Okey. "When Red Murphy and McMahon and Tawa and the she-ape get a grouch on, there'll be hell popping in that jungle. I've seen it for the last time. Not for a ship's hold of pearls will I put in at any lagoon on the Banda shore. They nearly made a monkey of me, Okey. Honored me by fetching a trained orang-outang from Java to hold my witless brains. Maybe they had my measure at that. I was fool enough to go in and idiot enough to escape. A wise man would never have come out alive."