

STRANGE TALES

OF MYSTERY AND TERROR

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*The tiger was stepping in
an uncouth dance.*



Tiger

By Bassett Morgan

SITTING on the porch of his bungalow, Harden watched the copper-colored moon creep stealthily from the black waters of the Malacca and tried to fight down the feeling that he would have done better to sell his plantation than

pit his courage and wits against the mysterious forces that baffle a white man in the Sumatra highlands. That morning his native workers had deserted the fields of young rubber trees and sugar cane, leaving only a few Chinese coolies and his three house-boys

The story of Senyap and the ghost-tiger—with Harden standing between.

who explained that an alarm of tiger had frightened the natives.

From the river village the beating of drums came to Harden, incessant and annoying as the throb of pain. Djac, his number-one boy, came to the porch and asked for an advance of wages to buy jimats, which are love-charms, or talismans against evil. Harden shook his head, which was a mistake.

"You've got one wife," he said. "Love-charms are a silly superstition. Is your old wife willing for you to marry again?"

Djac's manner was cringing, but his black eyes glittered. He explained that he wanted to buy a dancing girl from the temple and her price would take all his wages. Undoubtedly his old wife was jealous, for she belonged to a head-hunting tribe of Dyaks and she had made gifts and said prayers in the temple to cure Djac of his desire for the girl. But her youth and comeliness were gone, and the girl was beautiful. Of a truth, Djac needed jimats.

Harden was generous with wages, but he was new to Sumatra and had all a white man's scorn of superstition. He left Djac in a sullen mood with his refusal, and went for a stroll down the path to the road between a double wall of flame-trees and hibiscus in heavy bloom. The shadows on the moon's face were not unlike the eyes and muzzle of a tawny tiger-head, and he was glad when the disk sailed high and changed to silver.

COMING back to the porch he neglected to catch the door. Pajama-clad, his toes thrust in grass sandals he lighted a cigar and lay back in his chair conscious of the maddening buzz and drone of insects beating against the copper-wire porch screens. Then something cold and horrible touched his bare foot. At the same moment came

Djac's whisper, soft as the flower-scented wind:

"Don't move, Tuan."

Paralyzed by fear, Harden held his body rigid while a seemingly endless length of cobra slid over his instep toward the door. There came the thud of a weapon, a lashing and grating disturbance on the matting and Djac's yelp of triumph. Sitting on his own feet in the chair Harden saw Djac behead the cobra with a kriss and toss its still writhing body into the jungle grass beyond the flower hedge. A minute later he thrust a glass of brandy into Harden's hand. His whispered warning had saved Harden's life.

"Thanks, Djac," he said. "You get the money for jimats."

"To-morrow, I will kill the cobra's mate," said Djac. "There is a cousin of my old wife who is a priest at the temple, and he has great power," he added, sighing like a man with great odds against him. "But the girl is like the flower of the Tjindanwan-matahara, Tuan."

"But what took you, a Mohammedan, to this native temple to see the girl?" asked Harden.

"I did not go," protested Djac. "She danced out there in the starlight, Tuan, and charmed me so that my liver is fire for her. It was your own good fortune to be sleeping, or who knows. . . ."

Harden snorted his disdain of native women and charms, yet he wondered about the affair, whether it had anything to do with the desertion of his field workers. Cromley who wanted to buy his plantation had warned him to step warily on native mysteries.

NEXT morning Djac built a crude stage on stilts above the jungle grass, and under a sheltering palm thatch he sat, piping tunes on a bamboo whistle. Harden, fuming inwardly over his neglected

trees and cane, returned to the bungalow and writhed at the irritating monotony of Djac's weird tunes.

Yet the following morning a seven-foot length of cobra with its head smashed to a pulp lay near the house. Harden was generous in rewarding Djac, and the small brown man departed to visit his old wife and go about the business of bringing his girl bride to the hut near the river. Sonar, the second boy fingered a jimat hanging about his neck as he watched Djac depart.

"Evil will come," he assured Harden earnestly. "The priests can do anything. And My Lord prowled in the night near this house, though he never came before." Harden remembered that he had been warned never to speak of a tiger by its name, but to refer to it as "My Lord," lest the beast hear and take vengeance for the disrespect. He fought a growing sense of evil until Djac returned that night with bad news.

His old wife had disappeared. There was the trail of crushed jungle grass where My Lord had crouched to drink his fill of blood, then dragged its prey to a hidden lair. They also found the blood-stained sarong of his old wife.

In spite of the tropic heat, Harden shivered. The cobras had been bad enough. A man-eating tiger was far more dangerous.

"Then we had better go tiger-hunting," he said emphatically.

SHRIEKS of protest came from the three house-boys who gathered to hear Djac's story, and they now chattered excitedly in native lingo and broken English. Harden listened and began to understand that this particular tiger must not be killed. Having devoured Djac's wife it had become a family tomb, subject to veneration, worship and

dedicatory gifts. If Djac failed to observe the reverence due this receptacle of his wife's mortal remains, he would be haunted in this life and damned in the next incarnation. He grovelled in fear as he talked, bumping his head on the matting, moaning that his old wife had laid a terrible curse on him.

But was he to blame that the girl, whose name was Senyap, had danced for him in the starlight until he could not live without her? True, he had given her his old wife's bracelets, at which his wife wept and raged. But only a woman possessed of a devil would deliberately feed herself to a tiger because of jealousy. He would have to kow-tow all his life to this feline tomb to gain forgiveness of the lady in the tiger who took this means of suicide and vengeance.

Everyone knew it is the worst of evils for a relative to commit suicide, for the spirit of the departed haunts the place where his or her body lies. My Lord, the tiger, was not only sacred as a tomb, but he was ghost-haunted until vengeance was accomplished.

"This tiger—" began Harden, bringing howls of anguish from the three natives at the direct mention of the beast. He cursed and gave in to their fears. "My Lord," he began again, disgusted with his own helplessness, "has tasted human flesh and will be dangerous. If he is not killed he must be captured. Djac, gather your relatives and trap the beast. Otherwise I will shoot My Lord."

From that instant Harden felt a queer sense of loss, as if he had capitulated and sold his soul to some demon. The never-ending throb of tom-toms in the village was carried on a gust of wind, rippling in his flesh like the purring of a great cat. Now again he felt that he ought to dispose of his plantation.

DJAC departed to gather his people and make a tiger-trap on the river trail where there had been pad-marks in the soft ooze. All signs pointed to an old beast. Young tigers are seldom man-eaters. Also, it was the mating season when tigers in their prime are not flesh-greedy. Harden gave his servants a brief holiday for the hunt and went himself to the river where he saw the long stockade of bamboo lashed together, ending in a corral with a dead-fall gate weighted by a teak log.

In a natural cave in the hillside, Djac was building a cage-front of formidable bars. He beaded it with clean grass, decorated it with flowers and placed bowls of food as votive offerings. The native drums pounded incessantly. Harden went from the cave to where a second stout cage stood on a carabao cart near the corral.

Beyond the trap-gate a carabao calf was tethered as bait, bawling piteously, and adding to Harden's dislike of the whole business. The natives were feasting and working magic, and his fields were still deserted, except for the faithful Chinese.

In his house that night Harden tried to forget the tiger and avoided the sight of the yellow moon peering above the darkly brooding sea, but he could not shut out the purring throb of drums which got under his skin and behind his eyes, rippling in his flesh.

NEXT morning when Djac returned to report no luck in tiger-trapping Harden lost patience. It was lonely hill country, with natives unfriendly to white men and under the domination of temple priests and their tricky superstitions. But he had the courage to tell Djac sternly that unless the tiger was trapped that night he would go

gunning for it, and Djac shuddered in fear at the threat.

"My Lord now sees with the eyes of my old wife who was a woman of wisdom, Tuan. She will not be lured by the carabao calf. But there is one thing she desires above all else, and that she must have."

There was a resignation in the man's voice which alarmed Harden. Unable to shake off the feeling of impending trouble he went to the river in the evening and saw a dangerously excited group of natives near the hut where Djac had brought his bride-to-be.

Above the jabbering and clamor rose the high shrill scream of a woman, and Harden stalked to the hut and demanded an explanation of that cry of fear. He learned that, despairing of taking the tiger by other means, Djac had hoisted the girl, who was the cause of all the trouble, high in a nearby tree to attract the tiger.

Harden's gorge rose at the idea of baiting the tiger-trap with a woman. He marched through the crowd of natives, a commanding figure in his fresh white ducks and pith helmet, and talked to Djac as he never before talked to a native. His commands were met with sullen defiance from Djac and the other natives. Excitement exploded into rage and Harden found himself the vortex of an angry mob gesticulating with their wicked-looking waved krisses.

The Dyak relatives of the dead woman were in a nasty rage, and Harden knew his two revolvers could not hold that mob in check even if he wanted to attempt a shot that would be a signal for slaughter.

Controlling his voice and rising alarm, he argued and commanded in vain, then resorted to the only way he could think of to protect the woman in the tree from a possible attack of the tiger. He yelled

that he would share her night vigil, and, after a lengthy argument with Djac as interpreter, the crowd agreed. But they made it very plain that if Harden killed the beast its spirit would have company in death.

Although the death of the old wife was one of many such tragedies in a land infested with tigers, crocodiles, orang-outangs and cobras, the affair struck Harden as being out of all proportion to its significance. Alone in the village of semi-naked brown men, Harden saw blood-lust in their eyes, heard murderous threats in their jabbering, and, like flame in dry grass, the excitement swirled until it required courage of a ruddy order to face them and demand to be bodyguard for the young girl in the tree.

WHEN the chattering died to mutterings Harden walked through the village until he came to the tree. Already the bamboo stockade was in shadow, and the carabao calf in the corral wailed with hunger and fear. Once up the tree Harden found the least uncomfortable perch near a small figure swathed in white and lashed to a seat in a limb crotch. She sobbed pitifully and strained at her bonds. His blood boiled with the indignity of making a marriage chattel of the girl and using her as tiger bait. Yet, at sight of the menacing horde below, staring up and chattering, their betel-stained mouths suggestive of cannibal feasts, Harden could only control his rage and wait.

They vanished, and night fell with tropic swiftiness. The insect noise grew louder and the calf bawled monotonously. Harden wondered if a tiger that ignored carabao calf was now hungry enough to be tempted by the scent of a human being. The woman near him

had ceased sobbing. He caught the gleam of starlight on her metal anklets and bracelets and heard the tinkle of bangles. Then she spoke:

"Tuan, you will kill the ghost-tiger," she said, pleadingly.

In his halting Malay, Harden explained that he had given his word not to shoot the tiger, but once it was trapped she need not fear it again.

"Kill it, Tuan," she begged, "or it will live to haunt you."

It would not haunt him, he protested, because he did not believe in ghost-tigers. He talked for some time, quietly persuading her that the worst to be feared was an attack by the beast. Yet his reasoning did not shake off his own uncanny chill, or the tensivity that puckered his flesh as he awaited what the night might bring.

IN the tree the darkness was profound, but just as the moon-rim rose above the far-away black sea, the calf ceased bawling and the insect clamor died away. There was a quiet rustling as little monkeys scampered off. Then came deep, thick silence in which Harden felt something like the purring of muted drums that came nearer, set time to his rapid pulse, tingled on his skin. He stared below with his scalp prickling as if some indefinable presence were approaching.

The revolver in his hand came to full cock! Then, as if the tiger had heard the metallic click, it streaked into the open and turned its green, shining eyes towards the tree. He saw the black muzzle and white fangs, the venerable look of a white beard and magnificent stripes on the amber hide. Its tail lashed the grass with a silky hiss, and there came the frightened whimper of the calf.

The girl's hands clutched at him, and, sharing her terror, Harden slipped an arm about her as the

beast prowled below, gliding about the tree and trap, evidently confused by two different scents of prey. Harden felt cold sweat trickling inside his shirt until the tiger moved away, sniffed about the trap-mouth, then shot, like a streak of gold, in a splendid leap on the whimpering calf. There was a shrill bleat, the crash of a teak log, the vicious snarling of the tiger. The bamboo creaked at its angry lunges against the walls, but the natives came running from cover and howled their joy around the trap.

Cutting the girl's lashings, Harden lowered her to the ground and, as he followed, she was running toward the river hut.

DRUNK with triumph and native liquor Djac lorded it among his fellows, but Harden did not wait to see them prod the tiger into the cage on the carabao cart backed to the trap-gate. Returning to his house he slept through the noisy celebration at the river which continued through the next day. By evening he felt that enough time had been wasted on Djac's affairs, and seeing the torches of the river town flaring through night darkness he strapped on his guns and strolled down to interview Djac.

The early night was dark and the light of a solitary torch against the hill took him to the cave. On the clean straw, behind the cage bars of its den, he saw a splendid tiger. Its golden eyes followed every moment of Djac who squatted on his heels, chattering prayers and incantations, touching his head to earth at intervals, worshipping his family tomb. Fresh flowers draped the cage bars. Inside were fresh offerings of meat and rice. And after watching at a distance Djac's fervent petitions, Harden told the man it was time to get back to his work.

But Djac came to him with a rambling tale of more trouble. The dancing girl he had bought refused to worship at the tiger shrine and they could not begin the wedding until she showed proper veneration for his old wife's tomb, especially since her spirit dwelt in such a terrible home as this body of My Lord. He could not mate with a woman who refused to placate the "berhauntu." Instead of showing proper grief, the girl danced for joy. She outraged Djac beyond all reason. He could not beat into submission a woman not yet his wife. Perhaps the Tuan would talk to her, for she was loud in her praise of his master who had been with her in the tree.

"Bring her to the house," said Harden. "I'll try to talk sense to her. And you get back to work. Anything, for peace!"

HARDEN returned to his house with Djac and the girl. He finished dinner, after which Djac went to say more prayers to the tiger and left him alone with the woman. She had been sitting motionless in her white wrappings, with bowed head, until Harden spoke. Then she rose, dropped her white garment and stood like a bird of gorgeous plumage in the glow of lamp-light. Her jacket and trousers were kingfisher green. There were scarlet pompons on her red slippers. The teeth shone white between lips like a bitten pomegranate. Jeweled butterflies quivered in hair of dusky silk, slightly curly, and, by the rose-tinted amber of her skin Harden knew she was hybrid. Coquetry and allure shone in her eyes. She swayed on her feet like a flower in the wind.

"Why do you refuse to obey Djac?" he began, sternly.

Dimples stirred the warm gold of her cheeks.

"I am not yet a wife," she said.

"But a woman should obey her man," he protested.

"How should you know who have no woman in your house?" she asked with pretty impertinence. Harden laughed. Instantly her feet twinkled nearer. She knelt with her pretty head on one side like a pert bird, the butterfly ornaments twittering, her young breasts straining the silk of her jacket. Harden tried to scowl, but he was thinking how wasted this child was on Djac.

As if she knew his thoughts she swayed forward touching her forehead to his foot. Harden caught and lifted her to her feet, but she suddenly slipped to his knee and curled like a gorgeous doll in his arm, red lips parted expectantly, her eyes like pools of dark fire, her whole body an invitation.

For a moment he allowed the girl to clutch at the woman-hunger of loneliness in the Sumatra hills, then his face grew stern. She read his face like print and slipped from his arms. Then, crooning a wordless, tuneless song, she danced.

IT was as if humming birds were released to quiver like living jewels, as if fountains played brightly and butterflies flashed as bits of wind-blown silk. Her feet slipped from the sandals and with her arms she wove a story of passionate appeal. Never had he seen such fire veiled in sensuous gestures. His stern scowl melted, and through lowered eyelids he watched until she sank on the matting at his feet.

"My dancing pleases the Tuan?" she entreated.

"It is very pretty, Senyap," he admitted cautiously, then reached for a cigarette. Like a flash she caught the match from his fingers, struck a light and held the flame in her cupped hands. He caught the

fragrance of her perfumed body, saw the opal moons on her fingernails.

When he lay back inhaling smoke, she again danced, circling about the white garment which lay in a heap of silk gauze on the floor.

Suddenly she snatched it up, and, from a small basket he had not noticed before, two cobras glided, coiling their lengths on the matting. They lifted their swaying heads as she danced between them, twinkling, glittering as she sang, in so perilous a dance that Harden sat gripped by admiration and fear, a clutch that held him rigid as Senyap spun faster in the maddening whirl of the terrible death dance of the temple. Harden had heard of it. He heard of dread rites in which the dancing girls file out slowly leaving one alone as the bride of the awful hama-dryad god that lay hidden in a golden urn above the altars.

WATCHING the dance, fascinated by the swaying, hypnotic glitter of the cobras, Harden felt as if the walls of his house receded and left him motionless, trapped in a vast gloom of which the lamp was the altar fire, and this girl a priestess of evil rites that chained his will and lured his senses. With hair rising on his scalp and sweat starting on his palms, he found himself powerless to move or speak as she bent slowly backwards until the flat of her hands and feet rested on the floor and made of her body a living arch of flesh.

The silk jacket fell open. Her breasts were smoothly molded and gold-tipped with coral. And, as if trained to that lure, the cobras swung aloft and glided over her motionless, rigid body that shone like pale metal, then disappeared into the basket.

Still Harden stared, leaning forward in his chair, waiting, waiting, hearing the slow thud of his own heart, seeing the girl sway upright and begin a deliberate padding dance with her feet, keeping time to the pulse of his veins. Her pale arms writhed like white snakes, she moved with the grace of a cat, holding his gaze until he could have screeched at her. Yet no sound came from his parted lips, nor could he move foot or finger. He knew he was caught in a hypnosis, yet he was conscious of some dread thing to come and his inability to avert it. He knew he should have crashed a fist at this glittering creature trained by temple priests.

He was conscious, then, of the menace that had by devious ways sought contact with his life. Serpent lure and tiger ferocity breathed about her, and there came from her parted lips the strange purring sound of a tiger.

The sudden stab of memory cracked a little of that spell she cast. She leaped, but his hands met her as her white teeth grazed the skin of his throat. He caught her wrists as she screamed an inhuman, feline cry that started a rustling in the basket on the floor. Free of the trance gripping his will, Harden snatched at his revolver as he held the girl in one arm. Two shots rang out, and two cobras, with smashed heads, twisted in death frenzy on the matting. Then, as if a spell had been broken for her also, Senyap lay limp on his arm. He swung her to his shoulder and turned to the door, only to face Djac who had returned in time to see Harden catch her in his arms and start toward his bedroom.

FOR a moment Djac stared, then turned on his heel and ran. Harden touched his fingers to his

throat where her teeth had struck and felt them sticky with a few drops of blood. He dropped the girl and ran for permanganate, daubing the tiny wounds thickly.

Sonar heaved the reptiles from the porch and began to scrub the blood from the matting as Harden returned. The girl crouched in a corner of the couch, sobbing.

"Tuan, Tuan. You saved us both from the curse of My Lord," she said, and Harden stared. She seemed so pretty, so soft and helpless now, that he could not believe her teeth had drawn blood in that savage lunge at his throat. His mind was chaos as he went near the couch and she clung to him, quivering in perfumed warmth, her arms about his neck. Then he felt her body stiffen, and at the window he saw the face of Djac and his flattened brown nose against the wire gauze. The face vanished as Harden called him.

"Tuan, keep me here in your house. If you send me away, I die. Djac will think I am your woman."

"You had better be taken to the temple where you belong," said Harden.

"Tuan, Tuan, they will make me the bride of the serpent god! I have disobeyed."

"Disobeyed what?" he demanded, catching her wrists, forcing her arms from his neck, pressing her back on the couch cushions.

"Tuan, Tuan," she sobbed in hysterical fear. "It was commanded, and I was forced to obey. I have failed, and I shall be given to the hamadryad god of the temple."

Sonar had darted away with his task only half done, as if he feared to breathe air of this small temptress. Harden had not the heart to turn her into the night alone with Djac nursing the belief that she had given her charms to his master, so he carried her to the guest room and closed the door.

All that night he expected trouble, nor could he sleep for thinking of the strange hypnosis of that dance of death and the tiger-like leap of the self-hypnotized dancing girl who had been sent from the temple, trained in some wickedness that concerned himself. The dark and devious ways of priestcraft were inscrutable to a white man. Some mystery pressed close, but he assured himself he need only keep his wits and will working to shake off the clutch of evil that undermined a white man's morale.

MORNING dawned. The silver and pink mists of the valley disappeared, and the hot sun shot out of the distant sea. There was an ominous peace over the house, and Sonar's disapproval was tangible when he reported that Djac had not returned. In high dudgeon Harden started for the village to tell Djac to take his bride away from the bungalow and get down to work, or he would get another boy. But he did not find Djac, and the natives whom he tried to question ran from him, muttering incantations.

Thinking Djac was teeing the tiger, Harden went to its rock den and peered inside. For a moment he saw nothing. Then, as his eyes became accustomed to tree-shadowed gloom after the sun-glare, his breath caught. The grass was stained with evidences of a gory meal. The cage door was open and the tiger was gone!

Striking a match Harden held it until the flame nipped his fingers. He was not mistaken. The horrid remains of a man lying on the grass was Djac!

An exceedingly frightened white man ran through the hot sun to his own house and dropped in a porch chair, spent with heat and fear. Senyap was among the cush-

ions of his day-couch, eating fruit, and the sight of her made him furious. She was the cause of this tragedy, the death of Djac's wife and Djac. She had dared bring her cobras and temple tricks to his house for some fell purpose. Yet he dared not send her away now to the cruel vengeance of Djac's relatives, and it was worse than folly to keep her there. She had half confessed that she was sent from the temple for no good. She enticed Djac by dancing for him in the starlight and encompassed his death. When Harden told her about it, she preserved a callous calm, then said childishly and simply:

"He was only a servant, Tuan. I had to come to you."

"Why did you have to come to me?" he demanded. "Who sent you?"

"The god, Tuan. But I have failed his command. I will be an outcast, except to become the bride of the god."

HARDEN grew cold inside. Dimly he saw the wickedness of priestcraft dispatching this pretty messenger of death to charm him with her dance until he should have been helpless in her hands. Then the cobras! Well, he had robbed her of the cobras, and now he dared not send her away. He himself felt insecure and was afraid to leave the house. He could not eat, and at night he sat on the porch until the moon rose.

Then the girl who had sat all afternoon on the couch with her slender hands in her lap, motionless as a small Buddha, glided to the porch and curled at his feet on the mat regarding him with unwinking dark eyes. Harden dozed. He was wakened by the faint tinkling of her bangles and whisper of her voice. Small brown fingers touched his wrist. One hand point-

ed to the dark jungle grass, and, as Harden turned his head, he saw two twin green flames—the eyes of a beast staring at him. Tiger!

Those eyes moved up and down, across and back. The girl threw herself between his knees, clutching at his arms. Breaking her grasp, he went into the house for his gun. He was firmly resolved to kill the tiger menace once and for all time. But when he came to the porch the tiger was gone.

He slept badly, troubled by fearful dreams. As he shaved in the morning a gray-faced Sonar came with news that the ghost-tiger had killed a woman and her two children in a hut along the river, and terror stalked the land. Harden screwed his courage to visit the village to gather natives for a tiger hunt, but they not only refused to listen, they threatened him with death if he harmed the ghost-tiger which was now the tomb of both Djac and his wife. His life was in double jeopardy. Djac had seen the girl in his arms, and laid on his house the curse of suicide: his ghost would take vengeance on Harden.

With a naked rabble at his heels he went to the river hut where the sleeping victims had been struck down with merciful swiftness. Preparations for a funeral were in progress, always a precarious time, because of the consumption of liquor which inflamed the natives to murderous mood and the honor of winning a reward after death by slaying an unbeliever like Harden.

THAT night drums made the darkness hideous. Senyap sat at his feet on the porch, her eyes turned to the jungle. Her sudden cry whipped him to his feet and again he saw the twin green flames of tiger eyes!

Snatching the gun beside his

chair he fired twice, aiming between those glowing orbs. But they only moved nearer! Both shots had gone wild. Harden stared at the round clean bullet holes in the wire gauze where mosquitoes streamed inside. A second cry from Senyap turned his head. The tiger was on its hind legs, swaying to and fro, taller than a man, swaying and stepping in a cumbersome and uncouth dance. Harden was horrified as he stared at the grotesque spectacle.

"Tuan, Tuan, the Death Dance!" moaned Senyap, hiding her face.

His skin prickled as he took a second aim and fired, then cursed the gun. The tiger dance went on until it grew into a slow, undulating cat walk. Harden was breathless as he watched the tiger's grinning muzzle, his gleaming fangs, his lolling tongue. Senyap writhed in a frenzy of fear on the floor.

"Djac and his old wife have come for me, Tuan," moaned Senyap.

He carried her into the house, shut and locked the door, lighted lamps and turned on the gramophone, then called for whiskey. All night the spectral beast haunted him. At dawn he told Sonar to re-enforce the windows with wooden bars. The house was now a cage with the humans trapped within it, while the beast stalked at large outside. Harden laughed, but his laughter sounded queer. He drank heavily, and the third boy wound the gramophone all day. He commanded Senyap to dance—anything to drive out the memory of the golden beast.

To satisfy his reckless mood the girl became, in turns, bird and butterfly, and the room glittered and twinkled with her radiance. Drinking many pegs of brandy, Harden forgot the racial barrier between them. He caught her from her dance to his arms and lowered his head until their lips met.

A WILD screech of beast rage jerked him from that kiss. With the girl clinging to him, he turned to the window and saw the swishing tail and green eyes of the tiger. He tore the small fingers from his arms, feeling as merciless and brutal as the tiger and told Sonar to lock the girl in the bedroom. Her screams maddened him, and the night was one of terror.

In the darkness he heard the tiger snarling and purring at his windows. At times he heard it scraping the wire grating with its paws, and he smelled the fetid breath of the big cat. Gun in hand, he prowled all night shooting at beast eyes from every window. Drink and fear shook his hands, yet he felt cold sober except for those hot spurts of terror at the base of his brain. The shots sped harmlessly into the darkness. Finally he dropped into a chair with the gun across his knees and fell into a drunken sleep from which he awakened, unrefreshed, to the hot day.

He assured himself the affair was the result of loneliness and inaction, a touch of tropic fever, a disordered liver. But Sonar reported that even the Chinese had gone from his fields, and that there had been another tragedy in the night, an old man and an unbeliever who refused to make obeisance to the ghost-tiger.

"Tuan," added Sonar, his face a greenish hue with fright. "The number-three boy has gone to visit a sick mother. I also crave permission to visit my grandmother who lies at death's door. I have shown respect to the 'berhauntu,' My Lord, Tuan. Nevertheless it will not leave your house until this dancing woman is gone, nor will your gun kill it!"

Harden snarled a curse. Then, as Sonar left the house on winged feet, the laughter of the white man held

a note of incipient madness. The servants were gone and he had to get his own meals or go hungry. When he went to the larder it was to find only the spoiled remains of yesterday's food, and he knew that Sonar had been refused when he went to buy food from the village and for that reason had deserted.

He had to have food, and there was his car, seldom used because of the almost impassable hill roads made only for carabao carts. He might go deeper into the highlands and buy food from natives not affected by this mysterious curse laid upon him. But, as he left the bungalow, there came the tinkling of a bell, and he saw the patch of blazing yellow of a priest's robe, under an umbrella shielding him from the sun. The sight of it halted Harden. The girl crept to his side crooning songs, but his face was averted and he cursed her in words she could not fail to understand.

UP the path between the flame trees came the poongie, black eyes gleaming wickedly below his shaven head, holding out his begging bowl for alms. Harden laughed and spat in the dust.

The girl crouched at his feet whispering hoarsely:

"The priest who laid the curse, Tuan. The tiger-lord."

Harden remembered that Djac's old wife had a relative who was a temple priest. The robe of the poongie was tiger-yellow. His shaven head, the long narrow eyes and lips stained with betel looked bloody, carnivorous and cruel. He paid no attention to Harden's commands and curses as he stared through the screen, glaring at the girl who threw an arm up to shield her eyes. Harden caught the tiger-stench, heard the whirring prayer-wheel like the purring of a great cat as the girl's fingers curved like claws. Her eyes were glassy and flecks of

foam gathered on her lips from which came a snarling, mewing sound, horrible to hear, answering in some beast way the uncouth sounds from the poongie's mouth.

The screen door was fastened. Harden caught up the girl who fought at him and he carried her, struggling and hissing like a wild cat to the kitchen, where he sloshed water over her. At the touch of water her body stiffened as in a convulsion, then went limp, and she slipped to the floor. But a noise on the porch took Harden to the living room with his flesh crawling and cold with fear. He knew now that the crisis of the mystery was at hand and dreaded the swift-falling tropic darkness which swooped over the hills as the sun set. In the gloom of vines and trees about the bungalow he felt a presence that stilled the insect clamor and his own heart-beats. The little monkeys that played in the trees fled whimpering far away. Somehow he must keep this poongie from the girl whom his glance hypnotized into an unspeakable creature.

HE stared into the porch and the breath caught in his throat. From a hole torn in the heavy wire netting advanced a tigerish yellow shape with eyes like dark coals, yellow fangs showing from lips drawn back in a snarl. It glided toward him in a grotesque and growing form that was no longer human. Fascinated by terror, Harden watched the eyes change from black fire to glowing green that came nearer, holding him spellbound and helpless. Taller grew the shape of the creature until above him towered a tiger head with quivering red tongue drooling, purring so loudly that the sound shut out the moaning of the girl in the next room.

Slowly the beast thing was stalk-

ing him and Harden backed towards the wall with one hand groping. His fingers touched the barrel of his gun standing against the door frame and the touch of metal seemed to release a catch in his numbed brain. He caught up and swung the gun, firing against that advancing terror. The shot crashed and brought a screech of animal fury, a lunging shape tearing through the screens, vanishing in the darkness. Through the tiger stench, Harden was grateful for the honest smell of gun powder.

THEN in the silence he heard the girl sobbing, splashing water, and saw her bathing her amber body. She wrapped herself in white and knelt touching her head to the floor. He was staring into the night from windows and doors when she came on dragging feet. Then he remembered the significance of bathing to these Orientals and that white is their mourning color. He wheeled and caught her in one arm.

"Twice have I disobeyed when I should have killed you, Tuan. It is the curse of Djac's old wife whom you took into your house where he lived like a fighting cock and made her jealous. Because I loved instead of killing you, I die out there in the grass, not honored as is the bride of the hama-dryad god, but tiger-meat!"

He held her close to his breast with one arm, his other hand clutching the gun.

"Why is this curse laid on my house?" he cried.

"I have said Djac's old wife wanted him to live in her river hut. She asked her relative, the tiger-lord, to lay a curse, and I was sent to dance for you, and the cobras would have killed you. But you slept and Djac saw me dance, and desired me. Thus it was the old wife entered the tiger to haunt you and me. And a curse is laid

on me because I could not kill you, Tuan."

His mouth touched her lips lightly. She was merely the trained tool of a demoniac temple priest, and her heart had betrayed her master's training. Then looking toward the window he saw in the starlight the twin green eyes of the tiger. It stood on its hind legs, dancing. At it glided nearer his flesh again rippled with the evil purring of that beast. His scalp crawled and his legs were limp.

THE girl slipped from his arm. He tried to catch her, tried to call her name, but he was powerless to move or speak. She glided to the door, down the steps, and Harden saw the great beast pad-padding nearer, lifting its head in a roar of triumph. Then, like a blow came a memory of Senyap dancing for him, all glitter and color, parted red lips near his own, her body curled on his chair.

The gun falling from his nerveless fingers was caught up. He braced it against the window frame as the girl halted and dropped on her knees before the terrible ghost-tiger in the jungle grass. Harden's fingers jerked again and again. In that room the shots were deafening. From the darkness came a scream of rage, a threshing of the grass, a pitiful cry from the girl: "Tuan, Tuan!"

Clubbing the gun, he rushed to where she crouched and snatched her to his shoulder. Then, as the old moon with its broken edge

peered above the sea, the girl laughed softly and slipped her arm about his neck, spreading her fingers between which blood trickled from the tiger's claw marks that would scar her flesh for all time.

"They will not have me at the temple now, Tuan," she said, "for the brides of the god must be unblemished by birthmark, scar, or the caress of a man!"

But Harden was staring down at something dead in the grass. There was the shaven head of the tiger-lord. There were his cruel features and lips stained as if they sucked blood, and on the yellow robe lay bars of black that were shadows of jungle grass and light of the old moon. But now he was conscious of Senyap, speaking softly to him.

"You could not kill the tiger, Tuan. But when he changes his shape for the body of a priest he may be killed," said the girl, clinging happily to his neck. "But you did not kill the tiger so the workers will return to your fields, and the young trees and cane will thrive."

Harden made a generous gift to the temple for the accident to the poongie. Sonar and the number-three boy returned next morning and his fields were busy with workers. Senyap danced and filled the room with jeweled butterflies and birds, but Harden's eyes lingered on the claw marks of a tiger striped down her arm, the visible brand of a mystery still incomprehensible to a white man, even one who survives the tiger curse.