

THE LOCKED BOOK

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

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The
LOCKED
BOOK

BY
FRANK L.
PACKARD

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THE LOCKED BOOK

—I—
WHILE AN HOUR PASSED

THE *Waratan*, a small cargo steamer of some three thousand tons, lifted sluggishly, apathetically to the swells. The bit of sail rigged upon her gave her scarcely more than steerage-way. She carried no lights. Her engine-room hatch was carefully hooded with tarpaulins. From the depths below, muffled, there came the incessant clangour of hammers, of busy tools. The machinery was still. A mist hung in the light, following breeze, a wet mist that was almost a fine drizzle. There were no stars above. To starboard and port there was land—*islands*; many of them. They were there in the darkness—unseen. In the Malay Archipelago they are everywhere.

In the combination chartroom and wheelhouse a Lascar quartermaster, outlined against the blackness by the faint light of the binnacle lamp, took on the aspect of some grotesque heathen image as he stood impassively at the wheel. Forward, along the lower deck, there was the occasional movement of one or more of the native crew; a movement like the uneasy flitting here and there of shadows—half shadows rather, the white of the nether garments alone discernible, the naked bodies from the waist up blending into the darkness, lost.

On the bridge two men in oilskins stood motionless at the rail, staring out over the weathercloth; big men they were, and of a height, each well over six feet in his sea boots. The elder of the two, known for forty years from the China coast to the Coral Sea as Old Man Wayne, a strong, grim-faced man, robust beyond the years of his tell-tale white hair, spoke abruptly.

“We’ll get it to-night, son,” he said quietly, “as sure as I’m your father.”

Kenneth Wayne, the younger, answered as quietly:

“MacNee says he’ll have his engines turning over again, and all shipshape by midnight. I’m counting on that—and the darkness.”

Old Man Wayne shook his head grimly.

“They see in the dark,” he said bluntly. “And as for MacNee, he’ll be handling something besides a spanner before midnight. It’s beyond reason to expect anything else. Piracy ain’t stamped out of these waters yet, and never will be. Steam’s done a lot for it, more’n all the gunboats on the station; but when it comes to the low type Malay of the *Orang-laut* you can’t change ’em into anything but what they’ve always been and always will be, and that’s a throat-cutting, thieving lot of blood-letting savages. Gunboats! Bah!” He thumped the rail in sudden and profound contempt. “There’s something that ain’t human about these devils. You let a gunboat start out from Singapore and they know it a thousand miles away—and there’s nothing but peace and quiet waiting for the gunboat when it comes along. I’m damned if I or any one else knows how they do it—but they do.”

Kenneth Wayne nodded without comment.

Old Man Wayne was silent for a moment, then he took up the thread of his first remark:

“It’s beyond reason to expect anything else. We’ve been in plain sight of first one island and then another for the last two days, and don’t you make any mistake, my boy, we’ve been watched by a thousand eyes. Those rags of sails, that have given us just way enough to creep along and keep off the reefs, ain’t nothing more’n distress signals letting ’em know our engines have broken down. And there’s been a thousand tongues licking at as many dirty chops. They’ve only been waiting to gather strength. But they weren’t to be tricked either. That proa that sailed around us this afternoon, the first sign of life we’ve seen, was just making sure we weren’t something we didn’t pretend to be—a gunboat disguised, or anything like that. And, being satisfied, it’ll be to-night.”

Kenneth Wayne turned to face his father as he laid his hand with a quick, intimate little grip on the other’s arm.

“Oh, I don’t know, dad,” he smiled. “We may be quite mistaken. It isn’t like the old days you hear yarns about. Civilisation’s done a bit. You don’t hear much of piracy here nowadays, and——”

“Steam’s done it, as I said,” interrupted Old Man Wayne shortly. “Not civilisation! You can’t ever civilise beasts. I know ’em—I’ve known ’em, aye, and fought ’em for forty years. I know the treachery of ’em, and I’ve paid, by God, for what I know! I wouldn’t look a captain of mine in the face if I sent him to sea to-day anywhere in these parts unless he was well armed, even if they haven’t got much chance against a steamer. Accidents happen. Look at us to-night. And as for not hearing much about them these days,

maybe you don't; but there's four sailing vessels both of us can name that've disappeared in these waters in the last twelve months. What became of them?"

"Storms," suggested Kenneth Wayne.

"Scuttled and sunk," said Old Man Wayne.

"Well, you may be right"—Kenneth Wayne's smile broadened, and he laughed quietly—"though I hope you're not. Anyway, I'll gamble that proa didn't spot the couple of machine guns that were under hatch. If they come they won't catch us napping. As you know, the *serang's* had orders to arm the crew, and everybody's at stations. I'm not afraid of our men—they've no truck with these chaps out here. We're ready. We can't do anything more, except give them the hottest reception of their lives if they show up."

Old Man Wayne fumbled inside his oilskin jacket, pulled out a cigar and bit off the end. He chuckled a little grimly as the younger man leaned quickly toward him.

"I ain't going to light it, boy," he said amusedly. "I was at this business when you were cutting your teeth, and your mother was——" He stopped abruptly, his lips tightening on the protruding cigar. "What time do you make it?" he demanded irrelevantly.

"It ought to be nine or thereabouts," Kenneth Wayne answered.

"MacNee's making a bit of a row down there," said Old Man Wayne.

"It's muffled, sir," said Kenneth Wayne. "The sound of a ship's bell would carry a lot farther—that's why I ordered them not to strike it."

"So it would," agreed Old Man Wayne. He sucked for a moment on the unlighted cigar. "Boy," he asked suddenly, "do you remember your mother?"

Kenneth Wayne drew himself erect, he squared his great shoulders back, and his hand stole up and touched the dripping brim of his sou'wester. The gesture had come spontaneously, out of the subconscious, out of the years that were gone—a homage to memory taught him as a child by this man here, his father.

"Not very well, sir," he said in a low voice. "I was only a kiddie then, you know."

"She was a fine woman." Old Man Wayne seemed suddenly to be speaking to himself. "The finest mate man ever had. God bless her! I——" His voice trailed off.

The young man's hand found the other's shoulder.

"What is it, dad?" he asked gently.

Old Man Wayne shook his head.

"Nothing, boy," he said brusquely. "Maybe I'm a bit queer to-night. You've got her eyes. I guess that's it. I thought I saw her smiling at me just now." He laughed gruffly as he jerked the cigar from his lips. "I'll go down and see how MacNee's getting on—and where I can light this damned thing."

Kenneth Wayne made no answer, save for a tightened pressure of his hand on the old man's shoulder; then, as the other turned abruptly away, he leaned against the rail, following his father with his eyes until the latter was lost to sight in the darkness below the head of the bridge ladder.

And then he turned again, his eyes seaward now, and now his face was hard-set, his jaws clamped. He was disturbed and anxious, and a sudden, cold, indefinable fear seemed to be gnawing at his heart. He brushed his hand across his eyes. His father's words had taken him back through the years almost to babyhood, and there came before him the dimly remembered face of a woman that bent over his crib at night, and for a time had been associated with his every joy and sorrow—and then had suddenly vanished out of his life forever. After that, it had been the man who had just left him. His father. More than father! Like chums together—playing the game together. Years of it! Until to-night he was twenty-eight and in his first command. And that had been a sort of an event between them. In command! Old Man Wayne—he too called his father that because it always seemed like a title that had been splendidly won, something to be proud of, that stood for what men love most, honour and strength and faith and unbroken word—Old Man Wayne, though he had given up the sea for ten years past, had come along on the voyage, as he put it himself, to celebrate the event.

Kenneth Wayne's lips moved. He spoke aloud involuntarily:

"But I wish to God he weren't here to-night!"

To-night! Why to-night? Hadn't he laughed and smiled at the certainty with which his father had predicted attack? Lord! There was humour in that! Make light of it to reassure grim Old Man Wayne! In half an hour, an hour, sometime before daybreak, none knew better than himself that it was sure to come—unless MacNee got his engines going. Perhaps MacNee would make it a little sooner. . . .

He listened.

A faint thudding came from aft, from the bowels of the ship, the *tap-tap-tap* of a hammer—and now he could just catch the sudden chatter of the auxiliary on the steam steering gear as it answered to the wheel. Those sounds could not be heard very far away, and there were no others. There was a great stillness—an uncanny stillness. No wash; if there was a ripple at the bow it was all the *Waratan* was doing—barely holding a course. No throb, no vibration; just a quiet, a great, ugly quiet, as though the life had ebbed out of her. And it was black. He could scarcely see the foredeck. In the blackness she might elude them—until MacNee got his engines going. He brushed his hand again across his eyes. Old Man Wayne said they could see in the dark.

He knew that. He, too, knew this part of the world and its conglomerate races. Since a boy he had lived here; since a boy he had sailed up and down the China coast, along the Malay Peninsula, through the Archipelago, trading, speaking the native tongues and dialects as well perhaps, and as fluently, as any white man had ever come to do. He knew. He knew what was coming, and he would not be so futilely trying to persuade himself otherwise if Old Man Wayne were not aboard—no, not exactly that, though it was all of a piece—if Old Man Wayne had not made that remark about seeing the mother's eyes smiling at him. What was the matter? What was there in that remark to put him off his stroke?

Memories.

Why should memories throng to-night? Why should they come crowding in upon him now while he waited for *something* out there in the blackness?—memories not only of his younger days, but memories of the tales in out of the way places that men had told him of his father, and for the father's sake had done honour to the son—memories that made a sort of outline, as it were, of the forty years since Old Man Wayne had come from Gloucester in far away America. A trading brig out here first . . . all the savings invested in it . . . its loss . . . a grim uphill fight . . . another brig . . . and then a bit of a steamer . . . then a bigger one . . . and money. And then, ten years ago, the little fleet of three vessels that to-day numbered five. This was one of them. He was in command. The smallest of them all. That was like Old Man Wayne. A master's ticket didn't mean a ship for the son if it meant stepping over another man's head. He had held a master's ticket almost from the time he had been twenty. There hadn't been any vacancies when there hadn't been some one to fill them. There had been a wharf rat from Singapore, for instance, who had found refuge on the old brig. There

was a queer story in that. He remembered a chap telling him about it in Kutjing up the Sarawak River—a long way from Singapore!

What made him think of that? Oh, yes, of course! That was why he had got the *Waratan*, his first ship. The man had been senior captain. He had died a few months ago. The chap on the *Waratan* had moved up.

It was ten years ago that Old Man Wayne had given up the sea and had settled ashore to handle his ships and his trading stations—this was virtually the first time of any account that he had been afloat since then. And this, too, was like Old Man Wayne. It had not been put into words. Both understood. A milestone had been reached. It was the Godspeed of a friend who goes a bit of the way with one on a long journey. It was a toast to the first command. It was the expression of comradeship ripened with the years between father and son, between man and man. Old Man Wayne wouldn't have been here to-night otherwise—wouldn't have been here but for him, Kenneth Wayne.

Kenneth Wayne repeated that last phrase: “. . . Wouldn't have been here but for him.”

Strange! It wasn't a question of fear—not fear of those blighters out there. They would find the *Waratan* a hard nut to crack before they were through—a nut, it was even money, they couldn't crack at all. He would have welcomed the attempt with a sort of savage satisfaction ordinarily, as one would welcome, with every primal instinct of retaliation aroused against unprovoked attack, the certainty of annihilating some at least of a filthy and noxious rabble, lower than the beasts, whose bared teeth were at one's throat. But in the last little while, something, a prescience, a dread which he could not shake off, seemed to have crept upon him and now lay heavy on his heart.

He was a fool! He swore angrily at himself. He lashed himself pitilessly with stinging, contemptuous words. It wasn't the way to play the game. Not the way he had been taught! His head was up, his shoulders squared. He was quite all right again—quite all right——

A footstep sounded on the bridge ladder; a form bulked in the darkness and came toward him. It was Dorkin, the mate, a hard, tough product of the white man's outposts—like that wharf rat, somewhat, from Singapore, whose story was told in that fly-blown hostelry in Kutjing. Dorkin's idea of heaven was a fight. He was rubbing his hands together.

"They're out there now, sir," he said. "The *serang* says he hears them. He's got ears, that chap! He says they're all around us—sneaking down on us with the drift, I take it, and figuring to cut our throats before we know what's happened. About half a mile off, he makes it; not more'n another ten minutes or so before they're fair alongside."

"Many of them?" demanded Captain Kenneth Wayne tersely.

"The *serang* says yes—a regular wasps' nest of small proas." Dorkin answered with a low, throaty laugh. "Like a cloud settling on the sea, as he puts it. Blimy, sir, I fancy it'll be a night!"

"I fancy it will," said Kenneth Wayne as tersely as before. "Keep the bridge for a moment, Mr. Dorkin."

He turned away abruptly without waiting for a response, entered the chartroom, and called the engine room through the tube. The chief engineer's voice answered him.

"They're closing in on us now, Mr. MacNee," said Kenneth Wayne quietly. "Bring your crew up on deck and fight."

"Mon," said Mr. MacNee in a pettish voice, "I'm only wantin' another half hour, an' we'll be under way. It's a verra sma' request, sir!"

"I've no wireless with which to transmit it to them," said Captain Kenneth Wayne with grim sarcasm.

"Tush! Listen to that!" grumbled the voice at the other end of the tube. "A chip o' the old block!"

"Tumble up—with every man you can spare!" Kenneth Wayne ordered crisply. "You know your station. The after gun. And look lively, Mr. MacNee!"

He swung from the speaking tube to the chart spread out on the top of the locker, picked up a flashlight, and, shading the latter carefully with his oilskin jacket which he unbuttoned for the purpose, studied the chart critically for an instant. Those proas out there were not the only danger that the darkness held. He manœuvred quickly with dividers and parallel ruler. He was amidst a nest of islands. It was almost worse than dead reckoning, for the ship was logging practically nothing. But the breeze, what there was of it, was almost dead astern. There was a bit more sea room to port. He changed the course slightly, but not enough in any sense to bring the breeze abeam.

“Southwest by west, Pir Lal,” he said curtly. “And hold her there whatever happens.”

“Sou’west by west,” answered the impassive figure at the wheel. “It shall be held, O master.”

Kenneth Wayne, with a nod, stepped out on the bridge again, and rejoined the mate.

“Heard anything yourself yet?” he inquired in a low tone.

“I think I did, sir. Just a moment gone. Out there.” Dorkin pointed out over the starboard quarter.

“And there!” added Kenneth Wayne, pointing to port. “The *serang*’s right; they’re all around us.”

Dorkin was rubbing his hands—great, huge, hairy hands—together again, almost it seemed in a sort of unholy impatience. Kenneth Wayne smiled in the darkness. Dorkin, in a tight hole, was a heartening sort of a chap.

“It’ll be a fight, sir,” whispered Dorkin. “Man, but it’ll be a fight! Them with a couple of hundred, or maybe more; and us with twenty-four all told on the articles, and——”

“Twenty-five,” a voice amended quietly.

Kenneth Wayne swung around. It was Old Man Wayne. He had not heard his father come up on the bridge. Old Man Wayne was casually testing the mechanism of a revolver.

“Twenty-five, Mr. Dorkin,” said Old Man Wayne again.

“Oh, aye!” said Dorkin heartily. “And worth near the lot of us put together, you are, sir, in a bit of a scrimmage like this, I’d say.”

Kenneth Wayne turned his head away. Impulse, sudden, almost uncontrollable, bade him cry out passionately: “Dad, for God’s sake, keep out of this!” He bit at his lips as though literally to hold back the words. Impulse! Impulse would have prompted Old Man Wayne to make instant reply with a clenched fist full to the jaw. That would have been a man’s answer—and especially that of a man like Old Man Wayne. He knew his father. Old Man Wayne probably, certainly, would not have yielded to that impulse—but the impulse would have been there. Old Man Wayne to skulk, to hide, to keep under shelter when other men were fighting for their lives—and his! And what would he, Kenneth Wayne, have thought of the other for

such an act, even though he himself should have been the one who prompted it? His hands clenched until the nails bit into the palms. It wasn't that . . . it wasn't that . . . ! God in heaven, what was wrong with him to-night? These were men, these two, standing here before him, the type of Anglo Saxon unbeaten against whatever odds, the type that had brought honour and dominion to their race—as proud of their race as their race was proud of them. Men unafraid. And he was like a child to-night—like a child very near to tears.

Faint sounds came drifting out of the darkness now, up from the sea, from all around; a medley almost indefinable, yet strangely sinister—the low whine of the breeze through cordage as though in complaint of unwarrantable obstructions in its path, of trespassers upon its domains—the breaking of a wave that should still have rolled unbroken as a little swell on its trackless way.

A voice in the native tongue floated up out of the darkness from somewhere below the bridge:

“They come, O master! Give us light that we may see.”

“Presently, *serang*,” Kenneth Wayne answered in the same tongue. “Let them gather for the hunger of the guns of many bullets. Look only to it, thou, that they do not board amidships, either to starboard or to port.”

“That’s my job,” said Old Man Wayne. “Mine and the *serang*’s. Come on, Mr. Dorkin—or MacNee back there’ll be getting in the first shot on you!”

“No fear!” growled Dorkin, already at the bridge ladder. “Not him!”

Old Man Wayne lingered for an instant to put out his hand.

“They’re poor shots mostly,” said Old Man Wayne off-handedly; “but don’t forget, son, that that weathercloth on the bridge here ain’t bullet proof.”

“Look here, dad,” Kenneth Wayne said hoarsely, “I——”

But he was alone on the bridge.

—II—

THE MAN WITH THE CRIMSON SASH

FOR an instant Kenneth Wayne stood motionless. Somehow he couldn't see very well. And then with a jerk he swung to the rail. He wasn't a *son*—he was in command.

His fingers felt along the rail and touched an electric-light switch. Not yet! There were shapes showing out there in the darkness now, moving shapes—but it wasn't time yet. That wasn't what the lights, strung high up above the ship's sides fore and aft since yesterday afternoon, were for. They weren't making any sound out there, save what was stealthy and unavoidable. It was as though, close in even as they now were, they still counted their presence unsuspected.

There was a strange, stern quiet in Kenneth Wayne's face as, swiftly, his mind busied itself in a last minute rehearsal of the disposition of the *Waratan's* little force. The low, flush fore- and after-decks would naturally be the first and main points of attack—but there wasn't a man of the crew on either of those lower decks. Dorkin's and MacNee's machine guns from the boat deck must take care of those points. The weak point in the defence, though it was harder to board there, was amidships where the main deck made a sort of little alleyway on either side of the ship, and where the machine guns, as now placed, could not be made effective. His lips drew a little more tightly together. The main companionways opened on that deck—there was grave peril there. The alternative had been to mount the two guns, one forward on the forecastle, the other aft on the lower deck, where in a measure they might have commanded something of the lower amidships deck—but that would have been to divide forces, with inevitable disaster as the result if anything went wrong at either point. As it was, the crew were all on the boat deck below the bridge here, those not needed with the machine guns lying flat along the amidships' edge of the deck, themselves in a large sense protected by the boats, chocks and davit tackles, and where they could fire down the sides of the ship at point-blank range upon any attempt to board the *Waratan* from below them.

Kenneth Wayne's finger toyed again with the electric-light switch. Not yet—not for a second yet—maybe two—or three—not until the bulwarks swarmed thick with the *Orang-laut* and the machine guns sweeping port and starboard could do most deadly execution. "Like a cloud settling on the sea." That was what the *serang* had said according to Dorkin, wasn't it? And that was what it seemed to be like out there now—a cloud low on the sea, dividing, uniting into many shapes, superimposing itself on the night, stealing down upon the ship—closer—closer—*now*!

A yell, murderous, exultant, bestial, chorused by a horde of throats rent the air. It rose in volume. It pierced the eardrums. It was demoniacal.

Kenneth Wayne flung the switch over. A blaze of light ran along the ship, throwing the decks into sharp relief; and in the sudden transition from darkness there fell, as suddenly, a bated stillness, a silence, an eerie and uncanny silence. And to Kenneth Wayne it seemed to last interminably, and the climbing forms, some half-naked, some in fuller, if more fantastic dress, swarming over the ship's sides, clustering upon the rails for the leap to the deck, seemed for that same long, interminable space of time to have been robbed of movement, to have been transformed, as though at some supernatural touch, into grotesquely poised, inanimate things. The mind is swift in the etching of a picture. He was conscious of an impression of gargoyles . . . the whites of eyes out of myriad dark faces . . . the glint of a light ray on the naked blade of a kris . . . the lewd gayness of a multi-coloured *sarong*.

And then a white man's laugh, full, throaty—and Dorkin's gun was in action, its roar echoed on the instant by MacNee's gun aft. Screams, a hell's babel, suddenly filled the air. The foredeck was a seething mass of shrieking fiends as they came in a flood over the sides of the ship—and as suddenly, too, the foredeck became a shambles. Some fell, some rose again—and rushed forward—and fell. The machine gun under the bridge sprayed its murderous rain of lead from port to starboard, from starboard to port, swept the ship's rails, played full along the deck.

Kenneth Wayne leaned over the weathercloth and calmly emptied his revolver. There was a tall man in white garb with a great crimson sash, quite evidently the leader. The man seemed to bear a charmed life. Blamed queer! The man's followers were going down like swatted flies around him. Good old Dorkin! They'd had enough of it for a first dose—they were springing back over the rails again.

Kenneth Wayne reloaded his revolver, and fired again—at the crimson sash. No luck! The man had disappeared over the side. It was a strange sight out there. The light rays did not penetrate very far, and at their extreme edge they merged in a weird, filmy, misty way into a wall of blackness; but as far as one could see innumerable small proas were massed solidly together like some bizarre pontoon bridge surrounding the ship, and upon this a horde of fantastic figures ran hither and thither, yelling and screaming.

There was Crimson Sash again! Kenneth Wayne fired with steady, deliberate aim. Damn it, why couldn't he hit the fellow! The man was leaping from proa to proa, shouting furiously, rallying his men. And now he had vanished from sight again.

The fire from the machine guns slackened.

From aft a Scotch voice bellowed suddenly forth in uproarious and exultant song:

“The Campbells are coming . . . Hurrah . . . Hurrah . . .”

Above the tumult came Dorkin's voice hailing the bridge:

“That's giving 'em what's o'clock, sir! I fancy they've got their bellies full. S'help me, if the old *Waratan* ain't got a carpet for her foredeck out of the swine. Look at 'em out there! Artistic colour scheme, I calls it, and——”

“Stand by!” Old Man Wayne's voice broke in sharply. “Here they come—amidships!”

Kenneth Wayne jumped for the end of the bridge nearer him—the port side—and looked over. From a black, seething mass below and amidships came a burst of firing, while from the edge of the mass figures kept constantly detaching themselves to take the places of those who, leaping upward, snatching at the ship's rail, fell squirming, writhing things under the steady ripple of revolver and rifle fire that had now been begun by the *serang's* men lying flat along the boat deck.

And they were attacking on the starboard side too. The firing from there was quite as heavy as here. And now from aft MacNee's gun was in action again—but Dorkin's gun was silent. Kenneth Wayne swung quickly around to stare forward. Figures were creeping up over the forecastle head again, others were showing themselves cautiously at the rail sides—and Dorkin's gun was silent. Was the man insane enough to have left his gun with the idea of beating off the amidships attack against the *serang*!

“Dorkin!” he shouted. “What are you about? They’re boarding for’ard again! D’ye hear! They’re——”

Above the din, above the shrieks, above the hideous squeals of stricken wretches, came Dorkin’s bull-like roar, not in answer, but in a sort of volcanic spontaneity, as in a blind madness, the man blasphemed his gun. Kenneth Wayne caught the sense of it in the one word “jammed.” Dorkin’s gun was jammed. They were gathering there in greater numbers on the forecastle head, but crouching, hesitating, as though surprised at being unmolested. It was meant as a feint attack, of course, to keep all hands engaged—like the one now in progress at the stern, no doubt; but there was every chance that it would develop into the most serious one of all. He could not bring MacNee’s gun forward—the same situation would then obtain aft. No fool, that Crimson Sash! There he was now—the centre of a constantly shifting little group that came and went across the decks of the intervening proas as though receiving and executing his orders.

Kenneth Wayne levelled his revolver and pulled the trigger. The hammer fell with an impotent little click. Yes, of course; he had emptied it into that mob below there for the second time. And now Crimson Sash was gone again—this time to disappear, apparently, under the *Waratan’s* bow.

The group on the forecastle head, much larger now, and evidently grown bolder, even arrogant in its immunity from attack, was beginning to crowd forward. From oversides the rails were once more swarming with climbing figures.

Loading as he ran, Kenneth Wayne made for the bridge ladder, and gained the boat deck below.

“Every man you can spare, *serang!*” he shouted. “Half to the port and half to the foredeck starboard ladders! Quick! Look lively! Take the starboard ladder yourself. Keep ’em from getting into the alleyways below at any cost!”

He heard the *serang’s* voice, sharp, imperative, giving orders; and as he dashed forward now under the bridge to take his place on the ladder leading down to the foredeck, he was conscious that Dorkin still blasphemed his gun as he worked over it. He sensed, rather than saw, that a little knot of the crew was following him closely to the ladder—but it was the foredeck below that was dominant before his eyes. It was thronged now with a solid mass of half-naked things that came rushing forward with kris blades waving, with the flame-tongues of weapons spurting in vicious little flashes, with ferocious, upturned, inhuman, working faces, with ear-piercing and

abominable cries. And they were almost at the foot of the ladder—no, on it now—swarming up.

He met the rush—firing. A man dropped before him—another. He struck with his fists—gained a step. A kris blade swung and missed his shoulder. He laughed as he fought. There was Crimson Sash once more—just at the bottom of the ladder. He could see the man's face now—a handsome face for a native—smiling—smiling with cool malignancy. Why? What was the man smiling for? Yes, quite so! Over a naked, intervening shoulder the man was drawing a bead on him with a revolver. He felt himself suddenly pushed violently to one side from behind, half flung against the ladder rail. A spit of flame was in his face, scorching his cheek, but Crimson Sash had missed. Lucky push, by God—lucky push—

A body from behind fell against him, slithered curiously past him and lay sprawled upon the ladder, face upturned—a white man's face. And something took possession of Kenneth Wayne that seemed to blast asunder the soul itself within him. He screamed as a maniac screams, and as a maniac he launched himself into the ruck down the ladder. He struck and struck with his knotted fist, and fired until his revolver was empty—and then used the butt of it to smash the faces that danced before his eyes. And they gave before his advance, slashing at him. And he became not a goodly thing to see—his clothing torn and hanging from him—his body bloody. He pressed on. He wanted Crimson Sash . . . Crimson Sash . . . for a white man's face lay upturned back there upon the ladder . . . and it was the face of Old Man Wayne. . . .

“Come back, sir! For the love of God, come back!”

He heard the words. But they meant nothing. It was just Dorkin shouting. A great lust was upon him. There were more to kill—still more to kill. Many of them—but not enough. Not enough—all of them would not pay for Old Man Wayne—for Old Man Wayne was dead.

They closed around him, hanging to him, grappling with him, like a wolf pack with fastened teeth worrying its prey to earth. And they closed *over* him. But the great shoulders of the man heaved upward once again, and in his hands he held and wielded with a strength that only madness gave a shrieking, squirming thing of life. And for a moment he cleared a space around him with this human bludgeon that he swung by the naked legs—and then a blow fell—and darkness came upon him.

When he opened his eyes he was in his cabin. The one light burning was shaded. He struggled up to a sitting posture on his bunk. He was bandaged

in many places, and the bandages were red where the blood had oozed through. He heard the steady throb of the engines. He felt the vibration, the movement, the life of the ship.

He was conscious, even acutely aware of all these things, but they seemed to be extraneous, apart, of no moment. There was a sense of profound depression upon him that took precedence. He cupped his chin in his hands. What was it? Ah, yes; he knew! For what had been fullest, best, of greatest worth in life had been substituted something that gnawed now with bitter agony at his heart. Yes; he knew! He had known it all through the night—long before it had happened. He had known that it was to be up there on the bridge when—

The door opened. Dorkin came in.

“Oh, you’ve come around, have you, sir!” the mate cried cheerily. “But you’d better lie down, sir. I’ll carry on till you’re fit. MacNee’s got his engines going, as you can tell, and everything’s all right. It was the jamming of that gun, after all, I’m thinking, that saved us. You see, they thought they had us then, and the whole bally lot of ’em left off everywhere else to have a go at us from the foredeck. Packed full, it was, of ’em—thick till there wasn’t standing room. And then I got the gun cleared—they’d left you for dead on the deck, sir—and it mowed ’em down, and they broke and ran, those of ’em as could, and——”

“Where is Old Man Wayne?” Kenneth Wayne had not lifted his head from his cupped hands; he spoke in a monotone, abruptly, as though unconscious of the other’s words.

Dorkin’s hand, raised in his excitement to punctuate his story, dropped with a sudden, queer irresponsibility to his side. He coughed deep in his throat. He made no other answer.

Kenneth Wayne spoke again in the same monotone:

“He is dead. I know that. I knew it all along. He told me he saw my mother’s eyes smiling at him up there on the bridge. I knew it then. Why don’t you answer my question? It’s simple enough, isn’t it? Where is Old Man Wayne?”

“In—in his cabin, sir,” said Dorkin huskily.

Kenneth Wayne got up from the bunk, staggered, and then steadied himself on his feet.

“Stop, sir!” Dorkin cried out. “You mustn’t get up, sir! You’re not fit. You’ve near bled to death as it is.”

Kenneth Wayne started for the door. He kept swinging his right hand in front of him mechanically as though to sweep some obstruction from his path. His other hand he kept brushing across his forehead. He began to mumble to himself.

“My God!” whispered Dorkin—and reached out to block the way.

But Kenneth Wayne turned with a snarl, with both hands clenched, with both hands raised above his head. And then he laughed as the mate fell back. He went on again—out on deck, and around to the port deck-cabin just aft of the bridge. He opened the door and stepped inside, fumbled for the electric-light switch and found it. A form covered with a sheet lay on the settee. He drew back the sheet and stared at Old Man Wayne. He made no sound. His face was expressionless in the sense that it seemed incapable of anything but fixed immobility—its lines drawn, pinched, sharp, as though chiselled there upon some pallid, stone-like surface. His only movement was a slight swaying of the body from unsteady feet. After a time he replaced the sheet and went on deck again.

He lifted his face to the breeze. It was grateful.

It was dark along the decks now. But there were shadows dodging here and there. That was Dorkin there—and for some reason the man seemed to be trailing him. Damn Dorkin! And besides Dorkin there was the *serang* over there. What was the *serang* up to, messing around under one of the boats there, and making a worrying noise like a dog at a bone?

Kenneth Wayne called out querulously:

“What are you doing there, *serang*?”

“It is but one of the pigs’ litter, O master, hiding and wounded unto death,” the *serang* answered.

Kenneth Wayne lunged forward across the deck. The *serang*, a knife in his hand, was dragging clear of the boat chocks a Malay who was evidently very badly wounded, but who still snarled defiance as he gasped for breath. Kenneth Wayne stared for a moment at the Malay in a puzzled way. He was conscious of a great confusion in his head—and then, through the confusion, in a rush of passion that would brook no denial of its purpose, there seemed suddenly to be revealed to him the fact that this gasping thing at his feet possessed something of inestimable worth that must be yielded up. He

snatched the knife from the *serang's* hand, and held it against the Malay's throat.

"Speak!" he said hoarsely in the native tongue. "What island do you come from? Give me its name, and the name of your chief!"

The Malay shook his head.

"I have no mercy!" Kenneth Wayne shouted out. "You hear, you devil's spawn? The name of your island and your chief! Quick! Tell all, or you die!"

The Malay now made a weak effort to raise his head. He spat at the hand that held the knife.

"Am I a fool?" The man's voice rattled in his throat; his features worked with mingled ferocity and hate. "Great is the white man, but this he will never know! Am I a fool that I should tell? I die to-night of my wounds—or I go to be hanged—or I die by that knife. I die. Strike! Who is the fool?"

For a moment, his fingers twitching, Kenneth Wayne held the knife pricking at the other's throat—and then suddenly he flung it upon the deck.

"There are others, *serang*," he said, in a queer, confidential way. "Others who *are* fools, and will talk. Take me to them."

"There are none, O master," answered the *serang*. "Those of the wounded who had the strength threw themselves overboard."

"But the others—who had not the strength—like this man?"

The *serang* shook his head.

"When the leash is slipped," he said tonelessly, "it may not always be replaced until the scent is cold. As thou hast said, O master, this man hid; but unless there be also those that have done likewise—and *who have not yet been found*—there are no others alive. Such toll as could has been taken for a certain thing of which thou knowest." He stopped and looked down. The Malay with a convulsive movement had stiffened out and now lay still. "And now this one too"—he prodded the form with his foot—"is likewise dead."

"Yes," said Kenneth Wayne—and rocked a little on his feet. His own voice sounded a long way off. Queer about that! He gripped suddenly at the *serang's* arm. "Listen!" he said. "There was Crimson Sash. Did you mark a man amongst all those you speak of, a tall man with a crimson sash—like the colour of blood—like a band of blood around his waist?"

The *serang* nodded gravely.

“Him I saw in the fighting, O master,” he said; “and once afterwards on the deck of a proa as it sailed away.”

“It is well!” said Kenneth Wayne. He rubbed his hand across his eyes. What made the deck keep rising up and down like that—like a cursed see-saw? And here was Dorkin again! “Go away!” he mumbled—and reeled heavily against the mate. “Go away, I tell you! I—I——”

And then for the second time that night darkness fell upon Kenneth Wayne.

—III—

SALABAM

AUTHORITY took prompt action. A gunboat steamed with all speed to the latitude and longitude indicated by a little red cross on the *Waratan's* chart—all that marked, or ever could mark, the grave of Old Man Wayne. The lieutenant-commander in charge of the punitive expedition was a man of experience, resource, and infinite determination. He had been chosen for those qualities. He visited many islands, for there were many in that neighbourhood, and he found a score or more of peaceful native villages nestling upon the shores—but he found no stronghold. There were proas in every village, but nowhere in number more than were required for the fishing upon which the livelihood of the villagers depended. He met with open-handed hospitality—which did not deceive him. His questions, some none too gently pressed, brought him small reward. There was no head chief, no rajah over all the villages—only the head man of each village. Of what profit was it that there should be more than a headman over each village? They were of the *Orang-laut*, it was true; but they were not robbers. If there had been evil done, which was not to be questioned since the ship with the guns that spoke with a great noise had come, then it must have been those of the *Orang-laut* who lived always on the sea, and who had come far from the east, or the west, or the south, or the north. The anger of the white men was greatly to be feared. They were not madmen to desire that anger. The great white chief had eyes with which to see that they spoke only the truth.

The lieutenant-commander was not deceived—he was beaten. He returned to his base. His official report was couched in language that accorded with the regulations; but verbally, as man to man in the admiral's cabin, he permitted himself more license:

“If I'd had a shred of evidence, sir, I'd have made an example of some of them that wouldn't be forgotten for two generations—and I wish to God I'd had it! We'll never get them this way, sir. To begin with, they're all in it together; and in the second place there's not one of them dares talk because they've most unpleasant methods of putting a man to death. I'm positive

they've a secret rendezvous somewhere out there, and that there's a head swine running the job who has every last one of them under his thumb—but, damn it, sir, it's uncanny the way word passes about amongst them. They're ready for a gunboat ages before she reaches their waters. It's not much of a trick to divide up a fleet of proas among a couple of dozen islands, or metamorphose overnight—their architecture being a bit primitive—what might have been their murdering metropolis into a stinking, poverty-stricken fishing village!" He smiled grimly by way of preface to his peroration. "There's only one way I know of to put an end to it, and that's to wipe the lot of them off the earth—and let the evidence go hang!"

And so officially the matter was at an end when Kenneth Wayne became convalescent from the wounds of that night of some two months ago. He had no quarrel with the official result. What else could have been expected? The lieutenant-commander had made no mistake in his summing up of the situation. The function of a gunboat was to punish; and where a thousand eyes watched in derision, and a thousand tongues lied in unison, it almost inevitably defeated its own ends if at one and the same time it must secure for itself the evidence necessary to justify the infliction of that punishment. Also there *was* a "head swine" as the lieutenant-commander supposed. There was Crimson Sash. Crimson Sash had lived in all those weeks and days and hours of delirium during which he, Kenneth Wayne, had hovered with his wounds and fever between life and death, as a figure sometimes shadowy and ghostlike in a vague and filmy way, sometimes towering over him in monstrous reality, but always elusive, a malignant thing that robbed him of rest in his great weariness because he constantly sought to follow it that he might crush it, strike it, kill it, obliterate it—but just why all this should be so he could never quite make out. And then, with returning consciousness, convalescence had set in and it had become very plain and very clear, and he had understood. He had a rendezvous with Crimson Sash—for Old Man Wayne was dead, and the gunboat had failed.

And it was a rendezvous that he would keep. It was a silent pledge. He made the pledge to Old Man Wayne, and thereby it became irrevocable. It was a rendezvous that he would keep.

Kenneth Wayne left Singapore ostensibly to rest and recuperate. As Old Man Wayne would have done, he gave his senior captain the shore management of the little fleet, and Dorkin moved up to the command of the *Waratan*. Kenneth Wayne, in this reorganisation which he inaugurated, contented himself personally with the acquisition of a small mining prospector's kit, which consisted in the main of a bottle each of hydrochloric

and sulphuric acid, a magnifying glass and a prospector's hammer, to which he added a few text books for the sake of "colour," and notably amongst these a rather ponderous volume on metallurgy. Thus armed, from Singapore he went to Palembang—not by one of his own boats—where he was little known, and where very many vessels of strange register and description come and go. And here among the rakits, or floating houses of the River Moesi, he disappeared. Thereafter, by devious ways, while a month and still another went by, he journeyed many miles, now by this boat and now by that, until, satisfied that trace of him was lost, he took passage on a small and frowsy tramp steamer whose immediate itinerary coincided with his own, and one afternoon followed his gear over her rusty side as she dropped anchor in the little harbour of Salabam.

He had reached what might be called his pivotal destination.

From the native boat that carried him ashore, he took stock of the little town, shimmering in the heat haze, as it straggled at loose ends along the shore line of the bay. In its general appearance it differed in no way from any other town on any other island below the equator. Kenneth Wayne's dark eyes, clear now with restored health, lighted with a flicker of grim humour. Its table legs, for instance, would be immersed in water containers in the same old abortive effort to check the onslaught of ants upon one's food! And there was the hotel—all, or nearly all, bar downstairs, no doubt; sleeping rooms off the verandah above. The same man had built them all—thousands of 'em! And there was the population of the town on the beach—the arrival of even the woe-begone, cockroach-laden tramp out there was an event. Mostly natives, of course! All sorts—Bugis, Negritoes, Klings, the lighter brown Battas, a goodly sprinkling of Chinese. And a few whites—the expatriates! A riot of colour—both in complexion and dress!

He disembarked.

A slim little man in a rather dirty white suit pressed forward effusively.

"Ah, monsieur! Permit me!" The man removed a gun case from Kenneth Wayne's hand. "Monsieur is for the hotel, is he not?"

Kenneth Wayne found himself inspecting the other somewhat too critically perhaps, and therefore smiled disarmingly. The Frenchman—the man was obviously a Frenchman—had a shrewd, thin face with a goatee, which latter seemed to give a sort of Mephistophelesian touch to his features. Not very old—bordering forty, at a guess. Noticeably small eyes—jet black, and most amazingly restless.

Kenneth Wayne nodded.

“Yes,” he said.

“Excellent!” cried the Frenchman. “Leave all to me, monsieur. I am the proprietor.” He turned and shrieked at some natives in a vernacular most atrociously mispronounced and stilted, but which, however, seemed to be understood without difficulty for it resulted in an immediate scurry for the baggage. “This way, monsieur! Permit me to introduce myself. My name is Fouché, Nicholas Fouché, monsieur, at your service.”

“Mine’s Wayne,” said Kenneth Wayne briefly, as he followed his self-appointed guide through the little crowd.

“Yes!” said Monsieur Nicholas Fouché. “I am delighted! And monsieur, no doubt, has come to buy or sell. Naturally! Well, he will find good business here in resin, and pepper, and edible nests, and woods of all kinds, and many other things, to say nothing of *bêche-de-mer*. Salabam, as monsieur must know very well, is renowned for its *bêche-de-mer*. Many proas are engaged in the trade. Or, if monsieur has not come to buy, then _____”

“No,” said Kenneth Wayne quietly; “or to sell, either.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the Frenchman. “I see! Monsieur, then, is a tourist.”

“God forbid!” ejaculated Kenneth Wayne with fervent spontaneity. “Imagine any one sight-seeing in Salabam!”

“Heh?” Monsieur Nicholas Fouché halted on the beach, and turned around to stare into Kenneth Wayne’s face. Then he began to laugh softly. “Ah!” said he. “Yes, monsieur, yes! Monsieur has a sense of humour. It was like a prayer, monsieur—like a prayer. Monsieur has his own opinion of tourists. They flit, flit, flit—do they not?” He waved his hand in a series of jerky little motions. “Like that, eh? And they never stay long enough anywhere to remember where they are, or the place they last came from. Is it not so? And they all speak the same language. How *very* interesting! How *extraordinary*! I ask monsieur’s pardon. Certainly monsieur is not a tourist.”

Kenneth Wayne did not argue the question. It was evident that the revenue from Monsieur Nicholas Fouché’s hotel was not over-much swollen by the class of trade in question.

“I am interested in mining,” he said.

“Mining? Ah!” Monsieur Nicholas Fouché laid the length of his forefinger thoughtfully against his nose. “Mining, you said? But in all

Salabam there are no mines, monsieur.”

“But in the hills there may be minerals,” returned Kenneth Wayne.

“But, yes!” cried Monsieur Fouché with instant and encouraging enthusiasm. “Why not? Undoubtedly! And time it was looked into, too! Monsieur, no doubt, has a government concession which he——”

Kenneth Wayne interrupted the other with a ready laugh and a shrug of the shoulders. It in no way suited his book to offend this Monsieur Nicholas Fouché. The man might prove to be useful—but in the meanwhile Monsieur Fouché was beginning to bore a bit with his damned, and apparently ingenuous inquisitiveness. He had played up to the man enough. There was such a thing as overdoing it.

“Time enough for a concession when there’s anything found to make a concession worth having,” said Kenneth Wayne in a pleasantly confidential way; and then, abruptly: “Hello, Monsieur Fouché, I see you have an invalid as a guest!”

They had reached the road in front of the hotel, and on the wide verandah, which ran around the second story, Kenneth Wayne had caught sight of a cot, or bed of some kind, in which a grey-haired man was propped up with pillows, and from which a thin and emaciated face stared out over the railing, evidently intent upon the bustle incident to the boat’s arrival.

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché’s finger again went to the side of his nose; and his voice dropped to a whisper, though by no possibility could his ordinary tones have been overheard from the verandah.

“That is Monsieur Merwood,” whispered Monsieur Nicholas Fouché. “He is a great English savant. He is a member of some royal society—how do you say it?—ah, yes!—of the F. R. S. Imagine, monsieur, his accursed luck! Three weeks ago he arrived with his daughter, and immediately he is sick with dengue fever—what you call the break-bone fever. And he is no sooner on his feet again, when—would you believe it!—he falls and breaks his leg. *Incroyable*, is it not, monsieur?”

“A bit tough, at any rate,” said Kenneth Wayne, as they crossed the road and entered the hotel. “What’s he doing here?”

“He is writing a book, monsieur—a scientific book—about the natives and the islands. He has been everywhere, and he is a man of great learning.”

“I see,” said Kenneth Wayne—and halted suddenly.

The door through which they had entered gave on a huge and rather bare room. The bar ran the length of it, and here and there a few tables were scattered about. At one of these tables, the sole occupant of the room except for a grinning white-coated native behind the bar—the law evidently not being too rigorously observed—sat a bedraggled and scarecrow specimen of white humanity, his face a reddish purple, his battered pith helmet draped over one eye, his mouth wide open in inebriate song, his fists abusing the table as he strove to keep the tempo. The words came thickly:

An' when I die,
Don't bury me at all,
Just pickle my bones
In alcohol.
Put a bottle of booze
At my head and——

He broke off with a hiccough.

"Why, here's Nicky Fouché himself!" he cried boisterously. "Bloomin' luck, I calls it! 'Ello, Nicky, old top!"

"*Sacré nom!*" spluttered the Frenchman, with darkened face. "You are still here!"

"Nicky," said the man in grave complaint, "that cary-carycashure behind the bar shays he's run out of chalk. Give him 'nothser piece. You savvy me, Nicky"—he dropped a knowing eyelid—"my credit ain't all used up yet."

"*Sacré nom!*" exploded the Frenchman again. "I will talk to you in a minute!" He turned to Kenneth Wayne. "This way, monsieur!" And then, as they passed on into a hallway and began to mount the stairs: "A beachcomber, monsieur—an English one—a—a"—he was still spluttering in his wrath—"a *maudit* leech! He will die some day with the gin. I hope it will be soon!"

Kenneth Wayne made no answer. The genus beachcomber was ubiquitous, and, in view of that fact, the only curious thing about the incident was an expression—gone on the instant—that he had caught in Monsieur Fouché's eyes. A bit sinister, it had seemed—hardly warranted under the circumstances. It was none of his business, however!

They emerged on one side of the wide verandah. He was ushered into a room. His belongings followed him. The Frenchman appeared suddenly to have lost his garrulity, and to be in a hurry to depart.

“If monsieur desires anything,” said Monsieur Nicholas Fouché, backing toward the door, “he need only——”

“Not a thing,” said Kenneth Wayne pleasantly.

The door closed.

Kenneth Wayne had need of but a cursory survey of his surroundings. The room, with its mosquito-netted bed, its bit of mat upon the floor, the washstand of inexpensive make—shipped knock-down, probably, like the chairs—was but the counterpart of every other room in every island hotel he had ever been in. The thin partitions, of course, offered a certain privacy—but at once mocked it by echoing every sound both from within and without. It was airy and comfortable enough when there was any breeze to blow through the window shutters or the slatted door; but at the present moment it was hot—insufferably hot—the worst of the afternoon.

He flung himself down on the bed. Well, he was this far! Salabam! The town here itself perhaps held the information he wanted, but a white man could not prowling around the native quarters of a town without arousing suspicion and instantly, like the gunboat, defeating his own ends. The flicker of a smile in which there was no humour crossed his lips. To-morrow, or the next day, he would begin—prospecting! Not far inland, but along the coast where it would bring him into contact with the native villages bordering on the sea. Here on this island first—and thereafter God knew where! Salabam was the nearest civilised point, if it could be called civilised, to that red cross marked on the *Waratan's* chart. That was all. Salabam was headquarters; it established him, as it were, in the eyes of the natives. He was the white man from the hotel in Salabam who sought gold in the rocks of the hills. He would not find it—but all white men were mad.

Old Man Wayne was dead. He turned on his side, and stared in a blank, introspective way at the wall. That was why he was in Salabam—to find Crimson Sash. He was conscious it struck him as incongruous that he experienced no degree of either mental or physical hysteria—no, that was not quite what he meant—rather, that he knew no marked outbursts of passion, no moments when he was stirred into outward expression by an onrush of either grief or fury. Something cataclysmic had taken place in his life with the murder of Old Man Wayne, and yet he knew only a calm resolve to bring Old Man Wayne's murderer to account; something implacable about that resolve, though—something final, absolute—something that neither knew nor brooked denial. And it was fed by something, always fed by something; something, he recognised

subconsciously, that smouldered always beneath the surface; something that, in those vague snatches of delirium which he remembered out of his illness, had so often burst suddenly, in violence and fury, into raging flame, and that—he knew this as he knew he breathed, or moved, or spoke, or saw—some day would again.

Crimson Sash! Somewhere here in these islands was the man the gunboat could not find. The natives knew; but the natives did not talk to white men. They talked amongst themselves, though! And if a white man listened, a white man who had known the native tongue from infancy, he might learn many things—if it were not known that the white man, who needed an interpreter that he might ask even for food and drink, could understand even as one of themselves.

It was insufferably hot, a sticky heat—full of drowsiness. The drowsiness was gradually stealing over him. His thoughts came more in snatches—mental ramblings on the verge of dreams.

That little red cross on the *Waratan's* chart was many miles away from Salabam; but the proas that had gathered at that little red cross had, too, come from many miles away—gathered from many islands. . . . Salabam was not so far but that there should be huts even on this island here where women waited for men who would never return. . . . He must find an interpreter—ought not to be very difficult. . . . And men to carry the bits of rock that he chipped off with his prospector's hammer. . . . Organise the little expedition—boat, and all that sort of thing. . . . No chance of being personally known here—none of the Wayne boats had ever touched at Salabam, and the *Waratan* had only been in the neighbourhood because she had been on special charter. . . . Like the other end of the world so far as the Archipelago went. . . . And besides it was nearly four months ago now. . . . No one would associate a mining prospector with a sea captain. . . . The name meant nothing—Wayne was a common name. . . . He might have changed it, of course—but he had had an antipathy to that. . . . Impossible to imagine Old Man Wayne changing his name. . . . Queer thing, native telepathy—damned queer thing—ahead of the white man's wireless—uncanny. . . . But at least it wouldn't have heralded his coming the way it had the gunboat's—that was why he had taken so much trouble in getting here. . . . There would be talk in the native huts—whispers. . . . They wouldn't call the man Crimson Sash, of course. . . . Perhaps the man didn't wear it any more. . . . But the face could not change. . . . It would be the same face—Crimson Sash. . . .

His eyes closed.

It was late afternoon when he awoke. Still heavy with sleep, he raised himself on his elbow under the impression that some one was talking to him. He looked around the room. There wasn't any one here, but decidedly there were voices. He sat suddenly upright now. There were low voices—voices in earnest whisper. It was hard to tell where they came from—whether from outside the door on the verandah, or from an adjoining room. The thin partitions were nothing but veritable sounding-boards anyway—confusing.

He caught bits of the conversation:

“. . . *Pouf!* There is but one safe way, *sacré nom!* You understand?”

“But your safe way is dangerous.”

The first speaker was obviously Monsieur Nicholas Fouché; but something in the other voice brought a perplexed frown to Kenneth Wayne. The English was faultless; but there was something in the vowel sounds, an almost indistinguishable gutturalness, as he defined it to himself, that denied a native-born English tongue. Ah, yes—he had it. German!

“Bah! Is any fuss made over a stray dog? Well, is it not the same, *mon ami*? Listen! If he knows a little, a very little about me—it matters very little. He but cuts off his own nose if he talks. He is not fool enough for that. But if he finds out something else—eh? Something that he can sell for money—eh? That is different. *Mille cochons!* It is not only different, it is dangerous for some one that perhaps *you* can name.”

“Are you sure?” demanded the German voice. “How do you know?”

“I will tell you,” said Monsieur Nicholas Fouché—and still further lowered his voice.

And thereafter there was only an unintelligible murmur, which presently died away.

Kenneth Wayne was frowning in perplexity again. A Frenchman and a German—with English as the common medium of expression between them. Neither the termination of the war nor the years that had followed had yet made bed-fellows of the two again. It would require a very strong motive, or a very shabby one, for that! Yes, that was it—a very shabby one. Who ever heard of a Frenchman and a German in these days hobnobbing together out of mutual admiration and esteem!

None of his business, of course! Their talk, what he had sensed of it, had been shabby; but they certainly had not been talking about him. He had

other business in Salabam than to concern himself with an intrigue—a shabby intrigue—between a Frenchman and a German.

Nicky Fouché! That's what the beachcomber, full to the guards, had called the proprietor. Intimate sort of appellation—Nicky! Nicky Fouché! The name had a flavour. It smacked of Things! Sounded a bit apache-like, somehow. Perhaps it would be just as well if he kept an eye on his bill. He had thought of enlisting Nicky Fouché's assistance in securing a man to act as interpreter for the *mining* trip. He decided now he wouldn't. He looked at his watch. It was dinner-time.

He flung one leg out over the bed preparatory to getting up—and remained for a little while in that position motionless. Salabam seemed to be teeming with extraneous little incidents that, so to speak, kept brushing shoulders with him. For the second time that afternoon he was listening to a song. Not at all like the first one! And there was no trouble in telling where it came from, as there had been with the whispering voices. It floated in from around the corner of the verandah from about where the English scientist with the broken leg lay on his cot. But it wasn't the old man who was singing. It was a girl's voice. He listened. The voice was sweet, clear and true; but there was something else in it, too—sincerity, feeling. Perhaps it was the home-song itself that accounted for that. He listened until the last notes died away:

... Devon ...
Glorious Devon.

He swung his other leg to the floor.

"That's the old chap's daughter, of course," he informed himself. "Miss Merwood."

He fell to humming as he plunged his face in a basin of water:

... Devon ...
Glorious Devon.

—IV—

FELLOW GUESTS

THE food was not heartily inviting. Kenneth Wayne, as his *pièce de résistance*, ate an alligator pear. It seemed to distinguish him, set him apart, as it were, from the ants and flies that appeared to like his choice less than any other item of the fare set before them. They were not, however, above showing a certain friendly community of interest even in this, though each in turn eventually and politely retreated from the vinegar with which he mixed his dressing.

He found himself experiencing a vague sense of disappointment—not at all definable—and in no way connected with the unpalatable viands. He was fully acclimatised to such a table. He had known what he would have to eat, or not eat, before he sat down. Nicky Fouché's hotel in Salabam, as he had before remarked to himself, could not be expected to differ—at least for the better, being in a most out-of-the-way place—from a hundred other hostelries on a hundred other islands that were themselves alike.

The dining room itself was a reproduction of every other dining room—even to its adjacent location to the bar on the ground floor. It held six or seven tables. They expressed optimism. They were all vacant except his own and one, a little larger than the others, that stood over against the side wall. There were five men at this table, ranging from youth to well over middle age. He knew who they were; he knew all about them. They were in every dining room. They were the White Bachelors of the Tropics. They were clerks and planters' agents and that sort of thing, and perhaps one had a government job. They drank gin and tonic because the climate induced thirst, and they drank it until they came to like it too well, which was bad for the liver. They quarrelled a good bit because they saw too much of each other and no one else and couldn't help it. They called their jobs vile names and the place of their sojourn still viler ones, and swore they would sell their souls for a sight of old Piccadilly—and stayed to dice with a game of strange lure and seductiveness that was rarely beaten. They were going home next year. Rather! They had all nodded to him with the easy camaraderie of white men in far places.

Kenneth Wayne dug unenthusiastically at his alligator pear. There was no one else in the dining room. He had rather expected to find the girl with the voice here. He had glanced around the corner of the verandah when he had left his room, and she had not been there with her father. She hadn't sung any more, though he had listened. The thought of song brought to mind the inebriated beachcomber. Not very complimentary to the girl! The beachcomber wasn't here, either. Perhaps his credit didn't extend this far; or perhaps the point of physical inability had been reached—temporarily indisposed. He wasn't singing in the bar, anyhow.

Kenneth Wayne pushed his chair back finally, and, with a nod to the table of five, strolled out in front of the hotel. He lighted a cigarette, and, as he crossed the road toward the beach, glanced back. She was up there on the verandah now with her father. They were being served there, he could see. That accounted for her not having been in the dining room. He caught a glimpse of fair hair—nothing of the face which was bent over the table, and likewise partially hidden by the verandah railing.

He went on along the beach. According to Nicky Fouché, Mr. Merwood and his daughter had been here a number of weeks. In a purely impersonal way, he very much wanted to see Miss Merwood, talk to her, and talk to her father—but particularly to her. Perhaps that was really the cause of that sense of disappointment in the dining room. Mr. Merwood had been ill ever since he had been here, and probably wouldn't be of much help; but Miss Merwood, who had had to do everything for the two of them, must have picked up a lot of information that would prove valuable. There were the questions he had now decided not to ask Nicky Fouché, for instance.

Kenneth Wayne finished his cigarette and lighted another. He walked up and down the beach, his hands in his pockets, and finally stood still for a long time watching the tramp steamer on which he had arrived put out to sea again. And then, as he watched, a grim smile came to his lips, and a grim wonder to his mind. By to-morrow, or the next day, and through many to-morrows thereafter, he would be in a situation where a slip on his part, a very little slip indeed, would be the end of it all. He wondered when and by what means he would eventually leave Salabam—if ever? He laughed outright suddenly, in a low, harsh way. Why wonder? He had no quarrel with the price that he might have to pay, had he? He might not get out of it alive; he was not at all sure that he would—but he was conscious of a sure and certain foreknowledge that even so he would not have failed because he would have for company the man he had come to find. It was only a

question of price and he was prepared to pay. Old Man Wayne's grave could never be found again *either*, for that matter!

He swung sharply on his heel, and returned to the hotel. And on the verandah, a few moments later, noticing that their table had been cleared away, he bowed to the white-haired man on the cot, and to the girl sitting beside it, whose face he saw now for the first time—and yet he could not say it was precisely a face he saw—it was more the impression of a wisp of gold-red hair attractively truant in the light breeze, and blue eyes that smiled calmly into his in unconventional appraisal.

"I hope I am not intruding," he said, addressing the occupant of the cot. "My name is Wayne—Kenneth Wayne. Monsieur Fouché told me of the uncommonly bad luck you've had, sir, here."

The white-haired man extended his hand.

"On the contrary, Mr. Wayne," he said cordially, "you are very welcome. My daughter, Miss Merwood—Mr. Wayne."

Laughingly she, too, extended her hand.

"We've heard all about you, too—from Monsieur Fouché," she said. "Father saw you coming from the steamer this afternoon. An arrival in Salabam is an event, and we were wondering if you were going to ignore us utterly. Won't you sit down, Mr. Wayne?"

Kenneth Wayne drew up a chair.

"It's good of you to put it that way," he smiled. "I have to confess I slept."

"Well, so did father, and so did I," she returned. "There's very little else to do here under the circumstances. You are absolved, Mr. Wayne. And so you too—according to the informative Monsieur Fouché—propose going into the interior?"

"Too?" Kenneth Wayne, obtaining permission, lighted a cigarette.

"We were," amended Mr. Merwood. "But now I am almost beginning to despair."

Miss Merwood shook her finger chidingly.

"Now, father! It's only a matter of a few weeks before you'll be quite as fit as ever, and you know perfectly well that the work will be finished in plenty of time after all."

"Humph!" said Mr. Merwood doubtfully. "I hope so, Dorothy. I sincerely hope so." He turned to Kenneth Wayne. "I am engaged in writing a book on Malaysia, which will perhaps in a measure account"—he smiled—"for finding us here in this place out of the beaten path of tourists. But you, I suppose, are very well acquainted with this part of the world, Mr. Wayne—particularly this section of the Archipelago?"

Kenneth Wayne shook his head.

"Not nearly so well as I would wish," he answered. "In fact, that must really be my excuse for having introduced myself. This is my first visit to Salabam, and, knowing you had been here some time, I was anxious to talk to you. I am going to do a bit of prospecting—mining, you know."

"So Monsieur Fouché said!" laughed Dorothy Merwood.

Kenneth Wayne turned a sober face.

"'Nicky' Fouché, I think," he corrected, with assumed gravity.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "How do you know that?"

"Chap in the bar when I came in this afternoon," he replied. "Slightly under the weather, and perhaps therefore unduly intimate."

Her face became at once serious.

"That's Glover," she said. "I'm very sorry for him. I—I think he was a gentleman once." She smiled suddenly again. "Then you must have heard his song?"

"And another's," said Kenneth Wayne.

"Oh!" she exclaimed again. A little flush came to her cheeks. "Comparisons, sir, are—no, I shan't say it. Father, I interrupted you."

"No," said Mr. Merwood, "I was merely going on to say that this country—and I am speaking of the Malay Archipelago in general—is, I think, one of the places of the earth most worth knowing, and, at the same time, one of the least known. Certainly, and without qualification, I think I would be safe in saying it is one of the most maligned."

"Maligned?" Kenneth Wayne repeated questioningly.

"Why, yes; don't you think so?" Mr. Merwood, suddenly absorbed in his subject, gesticulated earnestly with his hands. "Amidst our own so-called civilisation what is the common conception of Malaysia? Precisely what De Barros described as 'a vile people, dwelling more on the sea than on the

land, and living by fishing and robbing.’ But he was merely describing what he called the Cellates, or ‘people of the Straits,’ the ‘Sea Gypsies,’ the *Orang-laut*; and, though it is utterly unwarrantable, that is the popular idea of all Malaysia to-day. Whereas, as you no doubt know, the Malays proper have long been divided socially into three distinct groups: the *Orang Benua*, or ‘Men of the Soil,’ that is, the uncivilised wild tribes; the *Orang-laut*, or ‘Men of the Sea,’ that is, the semi-civilised floating population—and the *Orang Malayu*, or ‘Malay men.’ And these latter possess not only a civilisation of long standing, but both culture and religion, together with a literature rich in ethics, fiction and legendary lore, some of which displays much descriptive and poetic power.”

“I’ve heard they’re very keen on legends,” said Kenneth Wayne quietly. “But apart from that, sir, I’m afraid I’ve held the popular belief pretty strongly myself. I’ve heard of a massacre or two, and a bit of filthy work here and there at their hands. One doesn’t forget that, sir. And I’ve heard that even to-day on sailing ships, or even steamers, they won’t sign on more than two or three Malays at the most on account of their treachery and what might come of the spread of it amongst the native crews.”

Mr. Merwood nodded his head gravely.

“I admit all that,” he said. “And that is the pity of it—that a whole people should be damned by its wretches. But that is merely the sordid side of it, and I am very anxious to show the picture in its entirety. It is work well worth while, I believe, and that is why I have undertaken it. But in reference to yourself, Mr. Wayne—and mining. I am very much interested. Gold, of course?”

Kenneth Wayne stared reflectively at the end of his cigarette. The ground beneath him appeared suddenly to be not altogether too safe. It was quite true that he possessed a prospector’s kit with bottles of hydrochloric and sulphuric acid, and several highly scientific books, but, apart from the few generalities he had been able to read, he was dismally ignorant and was not prepared to discuss the subject in any degree of comfort with a Fellow of the Royal Society.

“Yes,” he said—and coughed over his cigarette smoke. “Yes—gold. There should be gold here.”

“And tin,” added Mr. Merwood promptly. “Geologically, why not? Take the Peninsula. As, of course, you know better than I do, the rich stanniferous granites that form its backbone render it perhaps the most extensive storehouse of tin in the world. And gold, whence the land was known to the

ancients as the *Aurea Chersonesus*, is also found, I believe, in considerable quantities, both in quartz and in alluvial deposits, especially about Mount Ophir, in Pahang, Gomichi, Tringganu and Kemaman. Geologically, as I said, I do not see why it should not be here. The question, I should say, would be whether or not it existed in sufficiently paying quantities to warrant exploitation.”

“Exactly, sir,” agreed Kenneth Wayne easily—he had the bit in his teeth again. “There’s gold here—no doubt of it. But I’m bound to confess the rest of it is something of a gamble.”

“Father’s monopolising the conversation,” complained Dorothy Merwood laughingly. “Do tell us, Mr. Wayne, how you propose to find the gold. I suppose you’ll go inland and disappear for weeks at a stretch?”

Kenneth Wayne shook his head.

“No,” he said; “I think the work can be done more easily by boat—the longer distances, I mean. The hills, where I think there’s the best chance of quartz, rise quite abruptly from the shore on this side of the island, you know; and by travelling along the coast by boat it would be only a very short trip inland from any point where I wanted to stop off.”

“I see,” she said. “And when do you propose to start?”

Again Kenneth Wayne shook his head.

“Ah, that!” he smiled. “As soon as I can, of course. To-morrow if I could. But it will take a bit of doing to get ready. There’s a boat to be obtained, and supplies to buy, and a crew of five or six boys to hire, and a native to be found who can speak enough English to voice the complaints of the others—a sort of prime minister, or grand vizier, or boss foreman of the gang, or something like that.”

“Grand Vizier!” Dorothy Merwood leaned impulsively forward in her chair and clapped her hands together. “Oh, I wish I had thought of calling him that myself! Father, why *didn’t* I think of it—or why didn’t you? Gulab Singh would make a perfectly lovely Grand Vizier, turban and all, and——” She paused suddenly, and cast a quick, questioning glance at her father. “I wonder!” she exclaimed.

Mr. Merwood nodded.

“Not a bad idea at all, Dorothy,” he said; “provided, of course, Mr. Wayne isn’t going to be away longer than it is going to take me to get about again. Under those conditions he is heartily welcome to Gulab Singh.”

Kenneth Wayne stared in perplexity from one to the other.

Dorothy Merwood laughed vivaciously.

“Grand Viziers, and the Arabian Nights, and the Land of Enchantment!” she cried. “You’ve conjured them all up, Mr. Wayne.” She waved her hand airily. “You are to imagine that to be a wand. Now, sir—presto! You are in possession of your desires—a boat, supplies, a native crew, and your Grand Vizier who can speak English. And I think you may even start to-morrow, if you wish.”

“My word!” said Kenneth Wayne a little helplessly, as he joined in her laugh. “I wouldn’t dare presume to question your powers of magic, but _____”

“Oh, it’s quite simple!” she said naïvely. “All magic is—when you know how it’s done. You see, though we were going into the interior, we had much the same idea of travel as you have. There’s a river—I never can pronounce its name——”

“The Cheruchuk,” supplied Mr. Merwood.

“Yes—what father said,” she laughed. “It’s about half a day’s journey along the coast. You can follow it back for a long way until you come to what they call an inland lagoon—a lake, I suppose. Well, we decided that was the easiest way of getting as far inland as we really wanted to go, so we made all arrangements, boat, supplies and native crew.”

“Dorothy did,” interposed Mr. Merwood. “I was down with dengue fever.”

“Yes,” said Dorothy Merwood. “Father’s had the most poisonous luck. Everything was ready when he got over the fever—and then his accident. So I’m sure everything is still ready; that is, with a few hours’ notice. Gulab Singh secured the boat in the first place, so he should know where to get it again, or, at least, another, and he has had charge of the stores ever since they were bought. We don’t want to drive you away, Mr. Wayne”—she puckered a piquant little face into a roguish smile—“but, well, you see, there’s nothing to prevent you from going at once.”

“Oh, but I can’t do that!” protested Kenneth Wayne earnestly. “It’s altogether too good of you.”

“Nonsense!” said Mr. Merwood cordially. “You are really under no obligation. I certainly cannot go for some weeks yet. You can replace the

stores; and, as a matter of fact, you will actually be breaking the men in for us at your expense. Indeed, it's rather a service."

"That's a mighty nice way of putting it," smiled Kenneth Wayne.

"Not at all—it's merely the truth," returned Mr. Merwood. "The only objection I can possibly see is that you might want to be away much longer than the several weeks in question."

Kenneth Wayne hesitated. From staring out over the verandah rail to the sea, flooded now with the gold and purple of the setting sun, his glance travelled to Dorothy Merwood's face. Her blue eyes were fixed upon him, a frank and ingenuous smile lurking in their depths. And suddenly, and a little uneasily, he fumbled in his pocket for his cigarette case. Damn it, he hadn't bargained for this! He wasn't quite playing fair—quite playing the game the way they were. He wasn't going after *gold*. But then, he wasn't doing them any injury either, was he? There wasn't any question about not being back within Mr. Merwood's time limit—from this trip. A week or ten days was all he had ever planned to be away at one time, because he meant to *establish* himself beyond suspicion upon the island—come and go from the town here. Many trips, perhaps, unless he had luck—but this would save time now, and, besides this Gulab Singh would then be all the more ready to get other men for him next trip if necessary. Rather curious about that Cheruchuk River; it——

"Dear me!" sighed Dorothy Merwood. "And I thought I was magic-ing so wonderfully."

Kenneth Wayne experienced a sort of mental squaring of his shoulders.

"You are!" he said quickly. "And I accept with pleasure, though I'm bound to say I do not know how to thank you. It's tremendously fine of both of you."

"Good!" said Mr. Merwood approvingly.

"Also," said Kenneth Wayne, "I promise that your Grand Vizier shall be back here by the time you need him. And, speaking of that high functionary, who is this Gulab Singh and where is he to be found?"

"Oh, just outside the town," said Dorothy Merwood. "There's a Kling settlement about two miles from here—you know, of course, what that is?"

"Oh, yes!" said Kenneth Wayne gravely. "That's what the natives of India are called here, isn't it?"

“Yes, all through the Archipelago,” she said. “Well, that’s where Gulab Singh lives. And that’s who he is—an East Indian. I don’t know very much more about him, except that he is undoubtedly very capable, and, so far, has proved honest and trustworthy. He applied for the position almost as soon as it was known we wanted an interpreter—though father really doesn’t get along badly at all with the language—and we engaged him. His English—well, I shall leave you to judge that for yourself—but I am sure you won’t find any fault with it.”

“He sounds almost too good to be true,” laughed Kenneth Wayne. “I shall send a summons to the Grand Vizier to present himself here on the instant.”

“Better still,” smiled Mr. Merwood, “I would suggest that you two walk out there this evening, and my daughter will present you, Mr. Wayne.”

“I should be delighted,” agreed Kenneth Wayne heartily, “if it isn’t too far for Miss Merwood.”

“I’d love to go,” said Dorothy Merwood.

“Yes,” said Mr. Merwood, “and it will do her good. To be frank with you, Mr. Wayne, that is why I suggested it. She has not been getting enough exercise—tied hand and foot to the invalid, you know.”

Dorothy Merwood laughed.

“You’re not to imagine I need sympathy, Mr. Wayne. Shall we say half an hour from now? Father usually goes in about this time, and then reads until all hours, but——”

“I have to be tucked away first,” chuckled Mr. Merwood. “Mothered a bit, you know.”

Kenneth Wayne stood up.

“Then I’ll clear out,” he said laughingly. “I shall be ready whenever you are, Miss Merwood. And I’ll say good-night to you, sir”—he held out his hand to Mr. Merwood—“and very many thanks again.”

“Not at all!” said Mr. Merwood. “A pleasure, Mr. Wayne. Good-night!”

Kenneth Wayne walked briskly away along the length of the verandah; but, turning the corner, he halted suddenly, and, with hands thrust deep in his pockets, stood staring unseeingly down at the road below him.

“The Cheruchuk River,” said Kenneth Wayne to himself. “And an inland lagoon! Cheruchuk means stockade. I wonder why it’s called the Stockade

River?”

—V—
THE SHOT

THE twilight had merged into night. But it was not dark. It was a night of starlight, a soft, still, languorous night of the tropics, with the promise of a moon. And Kenneth Wayne, as he walked now beside Dorothy Merwood, could see her face and note its changing moods, now gay, now grave, now suddenly gay again, as, he plying her with questions, she talked of her home in England, her amusements, her friends, the many strange, out-of-the-way places where she had been with her father since her mother's death some years ago. And he found himself watching her face, liking its gaiety and its more serious moments—liking her laughter and her vivacity. And then, from one thing, they talked of another, until somehow it seemed to Kenneth Wayne a fact most utterly absurd that it was scarcely more than an hour ago he had seen her for the first time.

They had left the town by a very fair road running inland, which they had followed for perhaps a mile and a half or more, and now, Dorothy Merwood guiding, they branched off abruptly into what was little more than a by-path through a heavily wooded tract of land.

"This is a short cut," she explained. "The road goes up to the ford before it swings around. There's a little river between us and the Kling village, you know. Typical, isn't it? And yet, why not? Where time and a mile are of no account, why build a bridge for vehicles?"

"Quite right!" laughed Kenneth Wayne. "And, besides, the natives would probably continue to use the ford. But how do we get across?"

"Oh, there's a foot-bridge," she answered. "One of those swinging affairs that look so treacherous but which are really quite safe. It's just a little way on, and that will bring us at once to the Kling village."

"I see," said Kenneth Wayne; and then: "You were going to tell me something of Salabam, when we turned off from the road a moment ago. I wish you would."

"Why, there isn't very much to tell," she said. "In fact, as you walked up the beach this afternoon when you landed, you became as intimate with it

almost as it is possible to be.”

“I mean your own life here—the people,” he said.

“Oh, the whites! There are not very many. Let me see.” She began to check them off on her fingers. “Just the usual few traders and their clerks; and old Doctor Pearson; and a very crabbed old gentleman named Major Peters, who acts as a sort of Resident and port official and general factotum for the British Government; and the missionary and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Keene—and, oh, dear, that’s about all!”

“Except the guests at the hotel,” suggested Kenneth Wayne.

“Apart from a few clerks and ourselves,” she said, “there’s only one, an Englishman from some cloth house in Manchester, whose name is Mr. Walters. I really don’t see how Mr. Fouché makes it pay. There’s no tourist trade, and the cargo boats that touch here are few and far between.”

“There’s the bar,” said Kenneth Wayne.

“But he’s not supposed to sell the natives, and there are too few of the whites for him to make much money that way,” she objected.

“Unless,” said Kenneth Wayne, “they were all as good customers as that chap we were speaking about on the verandah—what did you say his name was?—Glover? A few like Glover——”

She turned toward him quickly.

“Don’t!” she said earnestly. “I’m frightfully sorry for Glover, as I told you. I don’t know what has brought him to this, but it is a terrible thing to see a man, who you instinctively feel was once, as I said, a gentleman, committing moral suicide with a sort of debonairly steadfast determination to accomplish that purpose and his own physical destruction at the same time. Nobody has anything to do with him. He disappears for days—and then he comes back to the hotel bar. They say he has a hut somewhere in the woods where he lives in some very primitive fashion. I spoke to him one day and inveigled him up on the verandah, and father tried to talk to him—but there was something about him that just simply raised a barrier against anything personal being said, if you know what I mean.”

“I think I know what you mean,” said Kenneth Wayne. “A gentleman gone to seed, but still true to form.”

“Which differentiates him from the ordinary run of beachcombers,” she said slowly. “He avoided us after that, and so——” She broke off abruptly. “But here’s the river and the bridge. I’ll go first; I’ve been over it before.”

They stood now in a little clearing, and he could make out a narrow foot-bridge, of perhaps fifty or sixty feet in length, spidery in outline against the night, fibre-swung from bank to bank. From below this there came the gurgle of swiftly running water; and beyond, on the other side of the stream, he could see a light twinkling here and there amongst the trees.

Dorothy Merwood had already stepped out upon the bridge. He followed—not too closely behind. It would, no doubt, bear their combined weights, but it nevertheless gave him the impression of being a deucedly flimsy affair. Halfway across, he heard her speak as he lost momentary view of her on the opposite bank. He caught only snatches of her words:

“... The Miss Sahib ... Gulab Singh ... *Challo!* ...”

And then, a moment later, as he rejoined her, she was alone.

“I met one of the villagers,” she explained, “and sent him for Gulab Singh.” Her laugh rippled out suddenly. “Do you know,” she said, “I’d forgotten all about it, but I’m afraid we’ve made a very serious *faux pas* in coming here. Mohammed should never go to the mountain, you know. It lessens one’s dignity and authority. However, I think we’ve retrieved ourselves a bit by turning that villager into an emissary.”

“Lose caste, you mean,” said Kenneth Wayne. They were standing close together, and now, in the starlight and the shadows and the clustering trees, as her laughter rippled out again, she seemed like some mischievous little white woodland sprite, slim and dainty and graceful. And he had a strange impulse to rub his eyes. “My word, Miss Merwood,” he ejaculated involuntarily, “I don’t think *you’ll* ever need to worry about that!” And then hurriedly, to cover a sudden and quite unaccountable self-confusion: “But where did you pick up the vernacular I heard you speaking just now?”

“I didn’t—I mean, I wasn’t,” she replied, still laughing. “Kipling taught the whole world that word. Don’t you remember, he said it was the word that moved all India—*Challo!*—Go on! I’m afraid it’s about the only one I know. It’s amazing, though, what it will do.” She put a cautioning finger suddenly to her lips, as the sound of an approaching footstep, unhurried, deliberate, reached them. “Here’s my Grand Vizier now,” she whispered. “I wish it were lighter so that you might see him better; he’s rather an imposing looking personage.”

A figure in white came out of the shadows, and bowed low before them; the figure of a man of great stature. Kenneth Wayne stared. As the figure bowed and slowly drew itself up, seeming almost to *grow* to its full height

again, he found himself suddenly thinking of a picture in one of his fairy-tale books of childhood that was all about Grand Viziers too—the picture of a figure in oriental raiment which, being released from its captivity brought about by enchantment, was emerging from the neck of a great, wide-mouthed jar, its erstwhile prison, and was elongating itself in air as it resumed human shape. A geni—or something. Utterly absurd! It was the shadows, of course, that lent a touch of the unreal and the fantastic to the scene; that, and Dorothy Merwood’s mention of a Grand Vizier again just a moment gone. He could not see much of the man’s face, not only on account of the light, but because the head was swathed in an enormous turban that covered the ears and likewise a goodly portion of the forehead; but what little he could distinguish gave him the impression of an olive-brown mask of strange immobility—or was it mysticism? The figure had a little beard, thin and patchy—so essentially Eastern. It was streaked with grey, he thought.

“The Miss Sahib,” said the figure respectfully in a deep, quiet voice.

“Good evening, Gulab Singh,” returned Dorothy Merwood pleasantly. “We have come to see you on some very important business. Is it well, Gulab Singh?”

“The Miss Sahib knows that it is well,” Gulab Singh answered gravely.

“Yes,” said Dorothy Merwood brightly. “Well, then, listen! The sahib here is a friend of Merwood Sahib, my father, and myself. His name is Wayne Sahib. He wishes to make a trip very much like the one my father and I had prepared to make, and he is anxious to go at once. Father thought you might be willing to go with him to act as headman and interpreter, and in that case he said you were to use the stores that you purchased and that are now ready. When you return and Merwood Sahib is well again, you will make the other trip with my father and myself. Meanwhile Wayne Sahib will pay you as father arranged to do. Can this be done, Gulab Singh?”

Gulab Singh remained thoughtful for a moment.

“Where does the sahib desire to go?” he asked. “The Miss Sahib says it is like the trip of Merwood Sahib and the Miss Sahib. They were going up the Cheruchuk River. Will the sahib also go up the Cheruchuk River?”

The *Stockade* River! Kenneth Wayne smiled coolly. Since two hours ago he had become particularly interested in this Stockade River!

“Oh, yes,” said Kenneth Wayne off-handedly. “A bit of the way anyhow. I think that will do excellently for a starter.”

“Wayne Sahib searches for gold,” explained Dorothy Merwood.

“I have heard that at one time there was gold in the hills of the Cheruchuk River,” said Gulab Singh slowly. “I do not know. When is it the sahib’s will to go?”

“At once,” said Kenneth Wayne. “To-morrow, if it’s possible. Miss Merwood tells me you secured a suitable boat for them and that you’ve already got the supplies, so I don’t suppose you’ll have any difficulty in getting whatever men you think are necessary for the trip. I shall have to leave everything to you, for you will have to do the talking, of course.”

Again Gulab Singh remained thoughtful for a moment.

“To-morrow is very soon, sahib,” he said. “There will be much to do—but there remains the night.” He spread out his hands. “It shall be as the sahib wills, and I will go with him. To-morrow at an hour after midday the boat will be ready on the beach, and the men will come to the hotel for the sahib’s things.”

“Good!” said Kenneth Wayne heartily. “I am very much pleased, Gulab Singh; and I, too, shall be ready.” He turned to Dorothy Merwood. “With the details in Gulab Singh’s hands, there doesn’t seem to be anything more to be said. Shall we go back, Miss Merwood?”

“Yes,” she said. She smiled at the tall figure in white. “Good-night, Gulab Singh. I am so glad everything is arranged satisfactorily. I will tell Merwood Sahib.”

“The Miss Sahib is very kind,” answered Gulab Singh. “Good-night, Miss Sahib. Good-night, sahib.” He bowed profoundly, and disappeared in the shadows.

They retraced their steps across the bridge.

“What do you think of him?” Dorothy Merwood asked, as they gained the other side and started back along the by-path.

“I think he’s decidedly a lucky find,” Kenneth Wayne replied. “He strikes me as a chap who’s got a lot more push and action to him than the average of his kind; and, besides, he speaks English well, which is a most important factor.”

“Yes, of course,” she agreed; “and I——” She broke off abruptly, and grasping at Kenneth Wayne’s arm stood still, her face almost ghostlike in its sudden whiteness.

It had come without warning, quick, unheralded, sinister out of the blackness of the woods beside them—a shot, a gasping cry, the tear and crackle of yielding brush and undergrowth ending in the thud of something heavy as it struck the ground.

“Who’s there? What’s wrong?” Kenneth Wayne called out tensely.

There was no answer save a sudden and instant crashing of the brush and undergrowth again, but this time unmistakably due to some one running in desperate haste. And then, as this receded, there came a low pulsing sound like the sighing of the wind.

Only there was no wind.

—VI—
PIECES OF A PUZZLE

“THERE’S some one moaning in there—in the woods,” Dorothy Merwood whispered.

Kenneth Wayne laid his hand reassuringly over the one that, trembling a little now, still clasped his arm.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “I’m afraid there’s something wrong. Would you mind going back and getting Gulab Singh, Miss Merwood?”

“And you?” she asked.

He had drawn a revolver from his pocket.

“I’m going in there,” he said.

“But——”

“At once, Miss Merwood, please!” There was unconscious command in his voice. “And please hurry!”

He was already in amongst the trees as he saw her turn then and run back along the path toward the river. The shot and the ensuing sounds had seemed to be quite near at hand. He plunged forward, crashing his way through the branches, the foliage, the thick vegetation underfoot. And now he paused—listening intently. Nothing! He went on again. He was fairly sure of his direction. And suddenly he stumbled over something that was neither creeper nor entangling undergrowth. He felt out with his hands—over a man’s legs outstretched, a man’s body limp on its back.

He struck a match—and stared in the tiny flame into the face of a man across whose right temple there trickled a little rivulet of blood. A horrible jangle went through his mind—horribly apposite:

An’ when I die,
Don’t bury me at all,
Just pickle my bones
In alcohol . . .

It was Glover, the beachcomber.

The match went out. He lighted another, and, as he bent down over the man, through his mind, dispossessing that horrible doggerel, flashed ugly snatches of a whispered conversation between a Frenchman and a German: “There is only one safe way, *sacré nom*. . . . Is any fuss made over a stray dog? . . .”

But the man wasn’t dead. Kenneth Wayne whipped his handkerchief from his pocket, and swabbed the blood away from the other’s temple. The crude surgery of shipboard, the years of more or less intimate acquaintance with a ship’s medicine chest, had not qualified Kenneth Wayne either as surgeon or practitioner, but they had left him roughly expert. The man was not even seriously wounded. The bullet had grazed the temple, tearing the skin just enough to make it bleed. The man was stunned, of course, unconscious, and naturally very badly shocked; but with a little attention and a day or so of quiet he probably wouldn’t be any the worse for it. He was coming around now.

Again Kenneth Wayne lighted a match.

Glover’s eyes opened, blinked at the match-flame, then stared into Kenneth Wayne’s face—first in a puzzled way, and then with a dawning light of recognition. The man’s lips moved—he spoke thickly:

“Hello—hello, old top—didn’t expect to see you in No Man’s Land.”

“Better?” said Kenneth Wayne quietly. “We’ll have some help here in a minute. How did this happen?”

Glover eyed the match as though deep in thought. He hiccupped slightly, and touched his lips with his tongue.

“Got pinked, didn’t I?” He spoke more feebly now, as though his previous effort had been too much for him. “Somebody out shooting birds—stray shot.”

“It’s hardly customary, is it?” said Kenneth Wayne dryly. “Bird shooting in the dark?”

“By Jove!” Glover’s eyes suddenly held a bland and innocent smile; but he was struggling in his attempt to speak, and he hiccupped again. “Never thought of that—eh, what? Never—hic!—thought——” His voice grew weaker, and trailed off.

The match flickered and went out. Kenneth Wayne’s lips were compressed. He amended his original diagnosis. Apart from the wound, the

man was drunk. Naturally! Been at it all afternoon, of course—and Heaven knew how much longer! But he wasn't so drunk that he hadn't his wits about him. And a cool and steady nerve, too! He admired that. The man was trying to hide the authorship of that shot. Why? A possible explanation suddenly occurred to Kenneth Wayne. He struck still another match and searched around on the ground. The man might have come out here to chuck up the sponge—sick of it all—not an uncommon end under the circumstances. And then he shook his head sharply. There wasn't any weapon here; and, besides, the theory paid his, Kenneth Wayne's, intelligence no compliment. He had heard some one *running away* immediately after the shot had been fired when he had called out from the path back there.

"Glover!" he said, touching the man.

There was no reply. The man's eyes were closed. He was breathing stertorously. Kenneth Wayne frowned. He was not sure whether it was more the drink or the wound that was responsible, but the man was again in a comatose condition—a combination of the two, probably. But there was something else. The man presented a bit of a problem. What was to be done with him—literally? Though the wound was not serious, murder had nevertheless been attempted. Whoever had fired that shot would undoubtedly have fired another on discovering the first had not proved fatal—if "whoever it was" had not been *scared* off. Nicky Fouché for one, was it? Who was the German? Stray shot—stray dog! There wasn't any doubt about who the stray dog was. What was to be done? There probably wasn't a hospital of any kind in the town. Not the hotel—good God!—with Nicky Fouché for nurse! Damn it, it *was* a bit of a problem. The man had a hut of his own somewhere—out-of-the-way—lonely—the kennelling of a stray dog. He wouldn't be safe there—just inviting the *coup de grâce*. Glover wouldn't be in a position to protect himself for a few days—helpless—a mark.

Kenneth Wayne tied his handkerchief around the other's head; then he sat in the darkness, his knees drawn up, his hands clasped over them. Then after a while he unclasped one hand and pulled meditatively at his lower lip.

"Why not?" said he suddenly to himself. "The doctor had better see him as a precautionary measure, but he's quite all right—quite fit for it. Do him good, too. Get the hootch out of his system. It wouldn't interfere any, either."

He heard sounds of voices, of footsteps from the direction of the path. And now his name was called repeatedly:

“ . . . Mr. Wayne! . . . Mr. Wayne! . . . ”

“This way, Miss Merwood!” he answered back. “This way!”

There was a thrashing through the undergrowth, the glimmer of a light; and then, a lantern swinging in his hand, there appeared the turbaned figure of Gulab Singh. Close behind the East Indian came Dorothy Merwood, and behind the girl again there followed several other men who were evidently Gulab Singh’s fellow-villagers.

The lantern rays fell upon the figure on the ground.

Dorothy Merwood gave a low, startled cry.

“It’s—it’s Glover!” she cried. “Is he—is he——”

“No,” Kenneth Wayne answered quietly. “He’ll be quite all right in a day or so. There’s nothing to be alarmed about, Miss Merwood.”

“Oh!” she said. “I’m so glad—so glad!”

She knelt down beside the wounded man.

Kenneth Wayne touched Gulab Singh on the arm.

“Look here, Gulab Singh,” he said in an undertone, “somebody’s been shooting at him—and will again if they get the chance. I think that tomorrow Glover Sahib will be safest with us in the boat—and that meanwhile wagging tongues are more dangerous than the wound.”

Gulab Singh’s face was impassive.

“The sahib knows best,” he said simply.

“Yes, in this case, I think I do,” said Kenneth Wayne. “You can take care of him out here in your village to-night, can’t you? Without talk?”

“If the sahib wills,” Gulab Singh answered gravely.

“Good!” said Kenneth Wayne. “He is not seriously wounded, but nevertheless I will send the doctor out here.”

Gulab Singh shook his head.

“The Doctor Sahib was here to-night,” he said, “on his way to some villages far back on the island. He will not return for three days.”

“H’m!” said Kenneth Wayne. “Well, after all, it’s not at all necessary. It’s merely a flesh wound. You’ve only to keep it clean and bandaged.”

“In such matters,” replied Gulab Singh, “the sahib need have no fear.”

“Good!” said Kenneth Wayne again. “Then tell your men to carry him to the village.”

Gulab Singh gave a low order, and as the men moved forward to pick up their burden, Dorothy Merwood rose and came to Kenneth Wayne’s side.

“Do you think it is perfectly safe to move him?” she asked anxiously.

“Yes,” he answered reassuringly, as the little procession began to make its way out of the woods. “I’m quite sure it is, Miss Merwood.”

“But what are you going to do?” she questioned. “How are you going to get Glover back to the town?”

Kenneth Wayne had her arm and was helping her through the bush, and for a moment he did not answer. His mind was in a bit of a turmoil. Dirty business, this! Queer! Strange! *She* had a part in it—part of the problem. As they bent together to pass under a branch, her hair brushed his cheek. He remembered a truant wisp of it—back there on the verandah. Mentally, he swore savagely. Hell of a place for a girl like—like Dorothy Merwood, with only an invalid father—in a hotel kept by a man like Nicky Fouché!

“Well?” she prompted. “You haven’t answered me.”

“We’re not going to take him to the town, Miss Merwood,” he said. “They are going to look after him in Gulab Singh’s village here.”

“Here!” she exclaimed in surprise. “I—I don’t quite see why. If it’s safe to move him, the sooner we get him to the doctor the better.”

“The doctor’s not to be had,” said Kenneth Wayne. “Gulab Singh says he passed through the village to-night—to be gone for three days somewhere in the interior.”

They had reached the path. Gulab Singh and his lantern had halted.

“But we—you can’t leave him here!” she said a little sharply. “Think of the accommodation—and no proper attention. And the very fact that Doctor Pearson cannot be reached would seem to make it all the more necessary to me that he should be taken to the hotel, say, where he can be looked after far better than he could in the village here.”

He was disturbed. How much, for her own sake, was it wise to tell her?

“Yes, I know,” said Kenneth Wayne quietly; “but really I think he will be quite as well off here, Miss Merwood.”

In the lantern light he saw a little flush creep into her cheeks.

“I am afraid I cannot agree with you,” she said stiffly. “But if it is all quite decided, as it seems to be, then I shall stay too and look after him. I am sure father will be all right. Will you please tell him, Mr. Wayne?”

“But, Miss Merwood,” protested Kenneth Wayne, “that’s all nonsense—er”—he stumbled awkwardly before the sudden tilt of the little chin and the cold stare in the blue eyes—“I—I beg your pardon, I mean it’s not at all necessary. Really, it isn’t.”

“Indeed?” she said uncompromisingly.

“Oh, look here, Miss Merwood,” he said desperately, “quite apart from any other consideration, if you want the frank and brutal truth, Gulab Singh is a far more proper person to look after him than you are, for the simple reason that Glover is more drunk than hurt.”

She did not speak for an instant.

“Is that *quite* true?”

A voice, somewhat feeble, decidedly thick in utterance, began to intone what sounded like a dirge. The voice emanated from the burden in the arms of the natives. A word only here and there was distinguishable:

“. . . An’ when I . . . don’t bury . . . just pickle . . . in alcohol . . .”

The flush on Dorothy Merwood’s cheeks deepened.

“Quite,” said Kenneth Wayne.

Dorothy Merwood turned sharply to Gulab Singh.

“Let it be as Wayne Sahib has ordered,” she said. “Go, Gulab Singh!”

The head with the massive turban bowed in obeisance; and a moment later Gulab Singh, his men and their burden had disappeared along the path in the direction of the village.

—VII— MORE PIECES

“PLEASE, will you take me back to the hotel, Mr. Wayne?”

With the lantern gone, it was black here in the pathway under the arched trees. He could not see her face. Her voice was small and meek, but he had a suspicion she was smiling—perhaps even laughing at him. It would be quite like her. That was exactly what she would do. She had been angry, very angry with him a moment ago. He knew her quite well. He had known her a long time. Since dinner! Amazing! He answered mechanically, as he led the way along the path:

“Yes, all right! Of course, Miss Merwood!”

His mind was suddenly off at a tangent. The night was like a picture puzzle—an ugly one—with hopelessly scattered pieces. He was confused, anxious, puzzled, groping mentally for his way as in a maze. Glover, to begin with, was a queer card. Had the man heard, been listening to, the conversation, and for pure deviltry, or for a purpose of his own, played his part with that wretched doggerel just now—or was it genuinely the mutterings of semi-consciousness? What difference did it make? How much should he tell Dorothy Merwood? That was what had been bothering him all along. He wasn't *sure* Nicky Fouché had had a hand in this. Nicky Fouché and his German ally might have been talking about something quite different and far removed from Glover. Piffle! It *was* Glover they had been talking about. But he couldn't prove it. He didn't like the idea of Dorothy Merwood being there at the hotel with Nicky Fouché. If a man would commit murder — But Glover was one thing and Dorothy Merwood another. She was quite safe, it was absurd to think anything else—if Nicky Fouché did not have reason to suspect that she *knew* too much. Now he was coming to it! For her own sake it was much better to tell her nothing of his suspicions. It was impossible, of course, to hide the fact that Dorothy Merwood and himself had been the ones who had found Glover. Gulab Singh perhaps might be trusted—but the whole Kling village would know of it. Still, that would have no significance for Nicky Fouché. Anybody might have found Glover. The mere finding of Glover did not associate Nicky Fouché with the affair

as the guilty man. Naturally! His brows drew together in heavy furrows. There was another thing. It annoyed him intensely. He hadn't come to Salabam to get mixed up in a miserable, sordid, local affair that had nothing to do with—his lips twitched suddenly—with Crimson Sash. Nor did he intend now that it should interfere. He laughed harshly to himself at that. Interfere! To-morrow he would be away—and Glover with him. Afterwards . . .

His mind mulled on, and, furiously at work, unconsciously set the pace for his legs. They had left the path behind them and were out upon the road.

A voice spoke a little breathlessly at his elbow:

"I—I can't keep up with your seven-league boots, Mr. Wayne."

He slackened his pace instantly.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated contritely. "I'm sorry, Miss Merwood. Upon my word, I am. I"—a trifle lamely—"I was thinking."

"Yes, you gave me that impression," she said a little frigidly. "And I have been wondering if I am not perhaps entitled to some share of your thoughts."

"You have had a very large share of them—in fact, the major share, Miss Merwood," he said gravely.

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" she retorted, suddenly furious. "I mean, Mr. Wayne, that I am not a child. It may be quite true that Glover was—had been drinking too much, but the fact nevertheless remains that somebody shot him—tried to murder him."

"Yes," Kenneth Wayne answered. "And it has been a beastly experience for you. That has been constantly in my mind, Miss Merwood; and I have been trying to think out the best thing to do. I was just going to suggest that we say nothing about it until to-morrow, except, of course, what you may see fit to tell your father."

"Nothing about it?"

She stood still in the middle of the road; and in the lighter, moon-flecked spaces here, he saw amazement and a hint of indignation in her face.

Kenneth Wayne shrugged his shoulders.

"There are no police here, are there, to be set at once upon the trail before it grows cold?" he asked coolly.

She began to walk on again.

“No,” she said, “there are no police; but—but I do not understand you, Mr. Wayne.”

“I mean,” said Kenneth Wayne simply, “that nothing is lost by a little delay; and, on the other hand, it may mean a good deal to Glover. In a word, Miss Merwood, somebody tried, as you say, to murder him. The man’s peculiar habits render him an easy prey to a second attempt. Our presence to-night, I think, prevented—excuse me if I speak bluntly—the job from being finished on the spot. Now, whoever fired that shot ran away before he could have ascertained what the actual result of it was. I do not think he would dare return there to-night under the circumstances, and until he hears something about it he may even think it took fatal effect. And so you see if nothing is said now it sort of guarantees Glover’s safety for to-night—and to-morrow I have told Gulab Singh to bring him along with me on the trip.”

She made no comment—only walked a little faster. Glancing at her he saw the colour come and go from her cheeks, and that she was biting at her lips.

“Do you agree, Miss Merwood?” he asked quietly.

She looked up at him, and a smile, sudden, quick and demure, was in her eyes.

“You know I do,” she said. “But I’m not going to say I’m sorry, or that I think you’re splendid—because I really think you’re just a man-brute all the same.”

“I’d much rather you’d put it that way,” he laughed.

They went on down the road, and yet, strangely, with the entente re-established, they walked for a long time in silence.

It was Kenneth Wayne who at last spoke abruptly.

“I suppose there are a number of Germans here in Salabam?” he said.

Dorothy Merwood shook her head.

“I don’t think so,” she answered. “Not since the war. At least, I do not know of any.” And then, archly: “What a ridiculous attempt at conversation!”

“Yes; isn’t it?” he smiled. “Well, it’s your turn now.”

They had turned into the main street of the town, and were approaching the hotel. She nodded in the direction of the hotel porch where two men were sitting in chairs tilted back against the wall.

"I shall be quite as original," she said. "That man sitting there beside Monsieur Fouché is Mr. Walters, the Englishman from Manchester, I was speaking about."

"Oh!" said Kenneth Wayne. "Really?"

His eyes were on the two men, who had risen now and were lifting their pith helmets in salute. Mr. Walters was smiling at Dorothy Merwood—kept smiling at her—something that jarred in it—as though hungry—as though the man were on the point of licking his lips. It was in the man's eyes, too.

Kenneth Wayne glanced quickly at the girl. She was apparently unconscious of it. He returned the salute of the two men calmly, and passed on into the hotel with his companion.

Upstairs on the verandah, Dorothy Merwood held out her hand.

"Good-night, Mr. Wayne," she said. "I——" And then suddenly her face was thoughtful, and the blue eyes grave, and her voice was low. "As it is now, Mr. Wayne, you cannot go to-morrow without letting me know what _____"

"I won't," he promised.

He was still holding her hand.

She made no effort to withdraw it, but now she was as suddenly all laughter again, and roguishness was in her voice.

"*Good-night*, Mr. Wayne," she said.

He knew that a flush was on his cheek. He told himself that his mind had been engrossed with that Englishman from Manchester. And then, as he found himself stammering awkwardly in reply, he was aware that a slim little figure in white was disappearing around the corner of the verandah, and that he was alone.

He went slowly to his room, and, locking the door, lighted a lamp. He looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock. He had been eight hours in Salabam. As he undressed he smiled a little grimly. He was not at all sure that his advent had been auspicious. It seemed as though, in spite of himself, he was being dragged into some infernal machination that was not only utterly foreign to his own interests, but seemed bent on interfering with him,

waylaying him on his road, like Fate in ambush, as it were, juggling with him. Mr. Walters, the Englishman from Manchester, for instance, when he had risen from his chair to bow to Dorothy Merwood downstairs, had *almost* clicked his heels together! So! Mr. Walters and Monsieur Nicholas Fouché! That was the alliance, was it—the German and the French of it!

And then there was Dorothy Merwood.

He blew out the light, and got into bed. After a moment his hand under the pillow clenched into a knotted fist.

There was Old Man Wayne—and Crimson Sash.

. . . The rest was none of his affair. . . . He would be off in the morning. . . .

His fist was still clenched under the pillow when he fell asleep.

But he was not to sleep through the night undisturbed. He awoke in the darkness with the consciousness that some one was knocking softly on his door.

“Who’s there?” he called.

“Sahib,” a voice answered, “it is Gulab Singh.”

Kenneth Wayne sprang out of bed and opened the door.

“What the devil brings you here at this hour?” he demanded crossly and but half awake, as the moonlight fell on the turbaned head and impassive features of the East Indian.

“Sahib,” Gulab Singh replied unemotionally, “it is to tell you that Glover Sahib has gone.”

Kenneth Wayne stared.

“Gone!” he ejaculated. “What do you mean—gone? Where?”

“That I do not know, sahib.” Gulab Singh extended his hands helplessly. “I sat beside him and I thought he slept. I left his side for but a few minutes. When I returned Glover Sahib had gone. It is less than an hour ago, sahib.”

“Gone—eh?” Kenneth Wayne was not in a good humour. “Playing ’possum with you, was he—and walked out? That’s what I thought he was doing out there on the path when he began to sing. I’m sure of it now.”

“It is even so, sahib, as I see it,” agreed Gulab Singh.

“I’m damned!” said Kenneth Wayne. “Well there’s nothing to do, is there?”

“That is for the sahib to say,” replied Gulab Singh gravely. “I did not know if the sahib still desired to go now without Glover Sahib, or whether he would wait.”

Fate juggling again in ambush, was it! Kenneth Wayne’s face hardened. He knew a sudden, fierce resentment.

“Not for a dozen Glover Sahibs—if that’s his game!” he said savagely. “We go as it has been arranged, Gulab Singh.”

“It is well, sahib,” said Gulab Singh.

The man seemed to fade into the night—silently—like a shadow.

Kenneth Wayne closed the door and returned to bed.

But it was a long time before he fell asleep again.

—VIII—

WHERE NO MAN LIVED

THERE was an awning at the stern of the boat, and under this Kenneth Wayne, as he smoked, lay outstretched. At his feet, in a sort of little cockpit, Gulab Singh squatted on his haunches, motionless. Forward, six Malays tugged at as many oars. Astern, the little town of Salabam was just disappearing from view behind the headland at the end of the bay.

Kenneth Wayne raised himself on his elbows for a last glimpse of the place, stared at it indeed until the headland completely shut it out, and then dropped back to his former position. He half closed his eyes and frowned heavily. Queer business, that of Glover—dashed queer! What was the man's game? He had quite agreed with Dorothy Merwood, who had been uncommonly upset over the fellow's disappearance, that authority in the person of Major Peters should be informed of what had happened. Not that he had considered it would amount to much in results—but the proper thing to do, of course. He had seen Major Peters himself. Irritable sort of a brute! Liver, of course! Too long in the islands. Didn't rank Glover of much account: "Wasters like Glover were a disgrace to the community. . . . No credit to their race, sir. . . . Bad effect on the natives. . . . Too many of them."

Quite so! Kenneth Wayne watched a spiral of smoke curl upward from his cigarette. He had not, however, told Major Peters about the Franco-German alliance. Ethically, he might have been wrong in that. Perhaps he was—but nevertheless he had said nothing about it. There had seemed to be a dozen good reasons why he shouldn't, and no very cogent single reason why he should. In the first place, while he was perfectly satisfied himself that it was either Nicky Fouché or Mr. Walters, the *Englishman* from Manchester, who had fired the shot, he had not a shred of actual proof—nothing on which any action could be taken against them. They had even been sitting on the hotel porch when he had returned with Dorothy Merwood. An alibi or two up their sleeves, of course! He smiled grimly. A wily pair of birds! He couldn't have had them apprehended on what he had to offer; and it came down then to a question, ethical again, of making an accusation for the sake of a certain amount of protection it might possibly

afford Glover. But Glover, he had a very good idea, knew a lot more about who had fired that shot than he pretended, and Glover had elected, rather coolly and unceremoniously, it would seem, to look out for himself. There were other reasons. He did not, in a moral sense, rank his own affairs above his obligations to society and duty, but it was too serious a matter for him at the outset to saddle himself with a couple of implacable and unscrupulous enemies in Salabam if justice, for instance, gained nothing by it. And then there was Dorothy Merwood. It would have been deucedly awkward for her back there in the hotel—*dangerous*, perhaps, was the better word. A pair of human jackals parading honesty was one thing; exposed, and with their teeth bared, they became quite another. His hand clenched suddenly. Damn it, he didn't like the look that swine Walters, whose name should be pronounced as though spelt with a "V," had given Dorothy Merwood last night!

His eyes shifted from his cigarette to the back of Gulab Singh's turbaned head. Dashed queer, as he had said! The whole thing was dashed queer, and, now that he came to think of it, it was dashed queer that——

He raised himself suddenly on his elbow again.

"Gulab Singh," he said abruptly, "how did you know where my room was at four o'clock in the morning?"

Gulab Singh turned and regarded him gravely.

"Sahib," he said, "I awoke one of the hotel boys."

Kenneth Wayne subsided on his back once more. He felt as though he had been rebuked—for childishness.

He was tired of thinking about Glover. Why the devil should he, anyhow? His glance travelled forward now to the Malays at the oars.

"These are good men you've got, Gulab Singh," he said approvingly. "They row well together. I had rather expected you would have had your own men from your village instead of Malays."

"Sahib," Gulab Singh answered, "these men are better in a boat; and, as the sahib knows, we go amongst their people and not mine. It is well, I think, sahib, that it should be so."

"Right!" said Kenneth Wayne promptly. "I name you Gulab Efficiency Singh!"

"It pleases the sahib perhaps to laugh at me," said Gulab Singh.

“Not a bit of it!” returned Kenneth Wayne heartily. “You’re a man in a thousand. Not a hitch. No fuss. Everything ready to start at the hour named. I like that. And now about this Cheruchuk River. I haven’t had much chance to talk to you, but I think you said before starting that it wasn’t very far and that we should make it this evening?”

“Yes, sahib,” Gulab Singh replied. “At an hour before dark we shall be at the mouth of the river, where, if the sahib wills, we will make camp for the night.”

Kenneth Wayne nodded.

“There’s a village there, I suppose?”

“No, sahib,” said Gulab Singh. “Once there was a great village there, but now there has been none for many years. The mind of those living does not go back to the time. It is a tale that is told, sahib.”

“Tell it then, Gulab Singh,” said Kenneth Wayne.

“Sahib,” said Gulab Singh, “thus it is that I have heard the tale. Once at the mouth of the river was a strong village with great stockades around it, and up the river on both banks were other villages, and all villages had stockades, and it was even so until the river entered a lagoon at a distance it would take a fast rowing proa two hours to reach from the sea. Sahib, they who lived in the villages were pirates, and their leader was a great chief who was called the Rajah Kana-ee-a. And then, sahib, there came a mighty trembling of the earth and the lagoon was split in twain, and there rushed down the river the waters of the lagoon, and from the sea there arose a great wave to meet the down-rush of waters, and there were no more villages, and only a few escaped. And since then, sahib, what was left has been rotting with the years, and no man dwells there.”

“But the lagoon,” said Kenneth Wayne, “is that deserted too?”

“Sahib, there is no longer any lagoon.”

“The Miss Sahib spoke of one,” said Kenneth Wayne.

“Yes, sahib,” Gulab Singh answered; “but that is another one. Far up where the river begins, sahib. It is a three days’ journey in the boat. Does the sahib deem it easier to find gold where there are lagoons?”

Kenneth Wayne smiled at the unconscious irony in the question.

“No; not necessarily,” he said calmly. “Perhaps we shall not go up the river at all. We will see after we have camped to-night. I can tell better when

I have had a look at the place.”

“The sahib has only to command,” said Gulab Singh respectfully.

Kenneth Wayne lapsed into silence. So that was why it was called the “Stockade” River. He was a little disappointed—and now completely disinterested. Where there was no village, there was no gold—of the kind he sought! They would camp there to-night, and he would make a pretence of examining the rocks for quartz, and then they would push on along the coast—where there were villages.

He listened now to the chatter of the Malays at the oars. It was the little talk of the little circle in which they lived. They would probably have discussed *him*, serene in the belief that he would have understood nothing of what they said, had it not been for the restraining presence of Gulab Singh. It would perhaps have been amusing, and he would undoubtedly have heard some plain truths about himself which he might have swallowed as he would—much of the sort that children so ingenuously and gratuitously offer to their elders. In a sense they were children . . . his face of a sudden hardened . . . but they would better never have been born!

The mood passed. Protected from the sun, it was cool under the awning in the light breeze. He began to hum softly under his breath. There seemed somehow to be a haunting lilt to the air he hummed. He hummed it over and over again without consciously recognising it. And then, presently, words seemed to fit themselves quite naturally into the rhythm and tempo.

“. . . Devon . . . Glorious Devon . . .”

He stopped abruptly as though taken aback. That was the song Dorothy Merwood had been singing on the verandah yesterday. Well, what of it? She had a corking voice—and it was a corking song. He’d get her to sing it again, for that matter.

He clasped his hands behind his head, and stared up at the awning. A piquant little face, very charmingly so, a face of quick changing expression, now all a-ripple with laughter and roguish merriment, now grave and sober like a cloud-shadow suddenly thrown on a sunlit sea, visualised itself before him. He stared very hard at the awning. He could not remember ever having met a girl quite like Dorothy Merwood before. Her laughter was as something that she seemed to love, that was very dear to her, but it did not rob her of a deep-seated seriousness equally sincere, nor this latter in turn deprive her of the joy of living. The kind one could trust. He liked her hair with the glint of gold in it. Her eyes could be very angry—as well as soft.

Blue eyes particularly had that faculty. She had been a brick in that affair last night. Not a nice thing for a girl. No hysterics or anything of that sort. Cool—plenty of nerve. She should have been a man.

He sat up with a jerk.

“No—good God—no!” he ejaculated aloud.

Gulab Singh turned around.

“The sahib spoke?” he asked.

“It was nothing,” said Kenneth Wayne; “nothing, Gulab Singh.”

He lay back again, frowning now. His thoughts had been errant. He was a little surprised, puzzled somewhat, that he should have been so completely engrossed of late with people and events which had absolutely nothing to do with what was, in the last analysis, the paramount object in his life now. But instantly he shook his head. Why should it puzzle him? It was but natural. He was not fanatical in this thing he had set out to do. He was not running amuck. It was a pledge to be kept—a pledge to Old Man Wayne. He would keep it without any fuss. He might be killed. Quite possible. In that case it was at an end; otherwise he would go on—that was all there was to it. But because in the meantime he joined in the smiles of others, or experienced likes and dislikes for those with whom he came in contact, or took an interest in what went on around him, especially when extraordinary happenings such as last night were involved, it did not mean that he was either breaking faith with Old Man Wayne, if he could put it that way, or that it was an evidence of weakening resolve even though he might physically still be carrying on—as he was doing now—at this moment.

Queer thoughts! . . . Strange! . . . There was only one ending . . . Crimson Sash. . . .

The cigarette between his fingers crumpled and broke. He saw a foredeck ladder jammed with ugly naked things out of the pit of hell—mad with blood lust. And there stared up at him from under trampling feet upon that ladder a white man’s face—the face of a man who had died that another might live. Lucky push. . . . Oh, God!

He turned suddenly on his face, and, with it buried in his hands, lay motionless.

And, lying there, the afternoon passed in silence until at the end Gulab Singh touched him respectfully upon the shoulder.

“The sahib has slept long,” said Gulab Singh. “See here is the river.”

And Kenneth Wayne, who had not slept, nodded as he sat up.

“Right!” he said.

The boat, turning in from the coast line, was beginning to skirt the near bank of a stream which here, at its mouth, was perhaps half a mile in width, and Kenneth Wayne, as he stared at the shore, nodded his head again. If this had once been the site of a village, all trace of it had certainly long since been obliterated for the shore was dense with foliage and vegetation, save for a little stretch of sand ahead with a slightly more open space behind it—a good place for the night’s camp—toward which the boat was heading.

Kenneth Wayne stretched himself. He would be glad to get his feet on land, though the prospect wasn’t particularly inviting—what he could see of it. And then suddenly his eyes, from roving aimlessly around him, held, as he caught sight of it, upon a thin grey wreath of smoke rising from amongst the trees and apparently quite some little distance inland from the shore. In view of what Gulab Singh had said this was rather curious, for it could hardly be due to some other party journeying either up or down the river and making camp for the night, since in that case, rather than invite the labour of forcing a way into what looked like little less than a jungle, the camp would logically have been pitched on the shore itself. He turned to Gulab Singh. Gulab Singh was staring at the same object.

The boat grounded on the beach.

“I thought you said this place had been deserted for years, Gulab Singh,” said Kenneth Wayne, pointing to the smoke; “that, as you put it, no man dwells here?”

“Even so, sahib,” Gulab Singh answered in a puzzled way. “And even so I believed. For so it was as the tale ran.”

He turned to the Malays and began to question them rapidly.

Kenneth Wayne listened to their replies. He waited patiently and quite blank of face for the translation which he could have made with far more facility himself.

“No man has lived here, sahib, in their knowledge for all the years of that tale which I told you,” said Gulab Singh. “They say that when the death-water of the spirits came in anger upon the place it left the ground accursed and no longer good to dwell upon.”

“Which means, I suppose,” said Kenneth Wayne quietly, “that with the lagoon gone, which was a sort of natural dam, and the banks being low and

flat, the ground becomes more or less of a swamp in the rainy season and when the river is high.”

“Mayhap that is true,” replied Gulab Singh thoughtfully. “I do not know, sahib.”

Kenneth Wayne stepped ashore.

“Well, there’s some one here now anyhow,” he said coolly. “And under the circumstances the unknown inhabitant ought to be distinctly worth while. That smoke can’t be more than a quarter of a mile away at the outside, and I’ll take a look-see while you are making camp.”

“As the sahib wills,” said Gulab Singh. “But it is not well that he should go alone. I do not need all the men for the making of the camp. Let him take two. They will make a path for him; and, as the sahib knows, three are stronger than one. Also, sahib, if it be those of their own people who are here and in whose tongue the sahib is dumb, they will speak for him.”

Kenneth Wayne nodded.

“Yes, perhaps you’re right,” he agreed. “Send ’em along.”

—IX—

ITU KONCHI-KAN KITAB

KENNETH WAYNE crossed the little stretch of sand to the fringe of the trees; and here the two Malays detailed by Gulab Singh took the lead and began to force a way for him through the woods. It was not easy. The ground was very soggy, the undergrowth thick with tough and entangling creepers, the trees and branches close together, the latter annoyingly low and intertwined. Once, underfoot, he thought he detected the remains of one of the old stockades—a few small tree trunks, rotten, that crumbled to the touch, and that from a certain uniformity in which they still lay upon the ground might once have been posts.

But after what he judged to be a distance of some two hundred yards, the woods began to thin abruptly; so much so, in fact, that the belt of extremely thick growth through which he had just passed, suggested a stockade in itself. The idea intrigued him, for some of the trees must have been very old. He wondered, with a grim smile, if it were not more than merely a freak of nature that had been at work here in the days gone by to form a screen, quite innocent in appearance, serving both as a source of defence and a trap for the unwary, and behind which had been hidden one of the piratical and marauding villages of Gulab Singh's tale?

And a few minutes later he became quite convinced that this was so. He was standing in what was, comparatively, a clearing of considerable extent. The undergrowth was still wild, thick, tangled, luxuriant, but there were scarcely any trees, while still plainly in evidence, though for the most part mere heaps of decay overrun with vegetation, were to be seen the ruins of native huts—though here and there yet remained a few that, even in their dissolution, were more upstanding. And it was from one of these latter, over at the extreme opposite end of the clearing, that, rising straight upward in the still air, he caught sight again of the thin column of grey smoke he had noticed from the shore.

He made his way forward in that direction, the Malays following behind him now, chattering in low tones to each other. He could not catch any more than fragments of what they said:

“ . . . Here surely had been one of the villages of the great Rajah Kana-ee-a. . . . It was as their fathers had told them. . . . The smoke was not to be understood. . . . It would be better if the white man went more carefully. . . . Who could tell what was the meaning of that smoke? . . . ”

He paid no further attention to them. He reached the hut without having seen any one, or having heard any sound. But now as he stood for a moment in front of it he frowned a little in perplexity. It *was* a bit queer! A most strange place of habitation! The hut could hardly be said to be still standing. It had fallen from the upright posts upon which, like most Malay houses, it had originally been built, and the walls, what were left of them, canted at many perilous and unsafe angles. Also, he could see that, save for a very small and sagging portion in front, and this quite rotten, the roof was entirely gone.

Kenneth Wayne peered in now through the opening that had once evidently been the doorway. And then suddenly he rubbed his eyes in utter amazement, and stepped inside. At the back of the hut on the floor, or, rather, on the ground, where there was no longer any roof above or wall behind, two huge earthenware bowls, apparently filled with damp leaves or burning vegetation of some sort, emitted thick columns of smoke that spiralled together as they rose in the air. Behind these bowls were two grotesque, crude and quite hideous, wooden, squatting idols, some three feet in height, whose arms, extended to meet each other, supported between them an object of apparently still greater worship, for this latter had two little bowls of smoke incense all to itself which were suspended from the idols' arms. Kenneth Wayne, from where he stood a few paces away, could not quite make out through the smoke just what this object was, but it appeared to have some sort of a dragon scroll upon it and to be in shape much like a book.

There was a half whimsical, half grim little smile on his lips, as he stepped nearer and picked up this object of peculiar adoration from its weird and barbaric altar. He was probably committing a sacrilege unforgivable and of great enormity. Undoubtedly! For he heard quick and smothered ejaculations from the two Malays, who, having followed him inside the hut, now stood behind him. They were staring in a sort of incredulous wonder, a wonder mingled with suppressed excitement, at the object in his hand.

He stared at it now, too. It *was* a book—quite a large book. In size it reminded him of the old family Bible at home. And it was a most curious book. It was bound in leather, spotted, mildewed and worn in spots; and the whole was covered with an open-work design of a dragon in thick, solid

brass, very strong and heavy, turned greenish-coloured now, evidently with age.

“*Itu Konchi-kan Kitab!*” he heard one of the Malays whisper breathlessly.

What did they mean by that?—“The Locked Book.” He turned it over. Yes, it was locked. He could not open it. But there did not seem to be any lock on it. Perhaps a spring clasp, then? No. Ah, he had it now! The dragon’s tail and the dragon’s mouth met over the edges of the cover, and the tail was solidly brazed into the mouth. He could not move the covers by the fraction of an inch, nor could——

A scream, wild, demoniacal, rang suddenly and without warning almost in his ears, it seemed. And on the instant, quick—quick as the winking of an eye—the book was snatched from his hands. He was conscious that the gaunt, stark-naked figure of a man, a native, with long, matted hair, with shrieking lips, with eyes that blazed in a demented way, had bounded in through the broken wall of the hut, and, snatching the book to hug it tightly to a bony breast, had bounded back through the opening, still screaming in rage and fury, and was now running for the woods, close at hand again here at this end of the clearing, and where almost instantly he disappeared.

“Good God!” gasped Kenneth Wayne helplessly.

He looked at the Malays. They had drawn back toward the front of the hut and stood close together, startled, shaken, their eyes riveted on the opening through which had come and gone what had indeed seemed like little less than an apparition. What the devil did it all mean? They had appeared to recognise the book—called it “The Locked Book.” But he could not question them. He was not supposed to know a word of their language, much less to have understood what they had said.

For a moment he stood hesitant. Then he motioned the Malays out of the hut, and, following them, started on the way back to camp. He had found out what the smoke meant—some wild devotee with unhinged mind, a mad hermit worshipping a dragon-covered book. He was a bit sorry he had desecrated the poor creature’s shrine. Rather curious, though, that *Itu Konchi-kan Kitab!* The two Malays weren’t talking very much now, and then only in low voices. He couldn’t catch anything they said. He would question them, of course—through Gulab Singh. Some native superstition or other—they were all full of that sort of thing.

He walked on at a sharp pace, but the light was fading before he reached the camp. Here he found his small tent—part of the Merwoods' equipment—already pitched, and his personal belongings, a canvas kit bag, a leather valise and his gun case, deposited inside. A meal was in process of cooking over the fire. He called Gulab Singh to him.

“We found a ruined hut over there,” he said conversationally, “and inside there were two idols and a book covered with the brass design of a dragon whose mouth and tail fastened the book together so that it could not be opened. The smoke was the incense from burning leaves. I picked up the book from where it lay on the idols' arms to examine it, and a native, naked as the day he was born, rushed in and seized the book from me, and ran screaming away into the woods again. The man was insane, I believe, and that I can understand—a madman's worship of it be no matter what. But the two men with me seemed to recognise the book. Ask them about it, Gulab Singh. I am curious.”

Gulab Singh for a moment remained thoughtful.

“All this is very strange, sahib,” he said slowly at last. “A book that is covered in brass like a dragon, and that cannot be opened because of the tail and the mouth which fastens it together. It is in my mind that in the tale of Kana-ee-a and the trembling of the earth and the uprising of the waters that I related to the sahib there is also such a book spoken of. But, sahib, I do not know these tales as the men of their own land know them. As the sahib has ordered, I will speak to them.”

The two Malays had joined the others around the fire. Kenneth Wayne with Gulab Singh beside him walked over to them. The whole group appeared greatly excited. Gulab Singh began to question the two men—and again, appearing only to gain an inkling of what was said from the expression of their faces and the gestures that they made, Kenneth Wayne stood by and listened. And at the end Gulab Singh, for the second time that evening, translated somewhat imperfectly what had already been very perfectly understood.

“Sahib,” he said, “it is as I thought. It is such a book, as the tale goes, that the Rajah Kana-ee-a was said to have. For many years he fought in many places, and took much booty from the white men's ships, and so much wealth did he amass, and in so many places, that he could not take it from place to place, and therefore much of it he hid in the different islands, and in such treasure he became rich beyond the wealth of any other man. So it is told, sahib, and so it is believed. And that he might find again when he

would these treasures, he fashioned a book locked with the mouth and tail of a dragon, and on the pages of this book he wrote down the secrets of where the treasures were concealed. And no man might open the book, sahib, not even himself, except by the cutting of the dragon's tail; and when he himself opened it to write within another hiding place of treasure, the book was locked once more by the fusing together of the metals. That is the tale, sahib. The body of the Rajah Kana-ee-a was found washed up on the ocean shore many miles from here when death came with the trembling of the earth and the flood of waters, but the book was never found. Men searched for it, sahib, until they died, and after them their sons, until, with the passing of the years men searched no longer, though all, even as these men here, knew the tale."

Kenneth Wayne stared at the restless group of Malays around the fire, and found every pair of eyes fixed upon him. He stared at the great turbaned head of Gulab Singh. All this was bizarre. Dorothy Merwood had already dubbed Gulab Singh a Grand Vizier, and he himself had likened the man to the figure in his fairy book elongating itself from the mouth of the jar as it escaped from enchantment. The Arabian Nights in real life! This tale of the buccaneering Rajah Kana-ee-a of many years ago, with his book of treasure secrets, might well have been one told by Shahrazad herself. He could imagine it all as a legend, embellished and enlarged upon as it passed from mouth to mouth, the imaginative faculties of those who related it adding a picturesque detail here and there, for Malaysia was indeed, he knew, a land of legends by which great store was set; but beyond this as a mere legend, as far as he was concerned, it was hard to go. A book that no living man had ever seen, that was supposed to have existed, and that disappeared with the death of its possessor some two generations or more ago, to turn up now—here! And yet there was a sense of reality about it, too—one that would not be denied. The legendary account, and that all the more amazing for the span of years it bridged, coincided in every particular with the description of "the locked book" that had now been metamorphosed into a pagan deity, or at least symbolised one, and as such was being worshipped by a naked and demented savage. In brief, *he* had seen the book.

"Gulab Singh," he said in a puzzled way, "what do you make of it? These men, I suppose, believe it is the original book?"

"Yes, sahib; they say that it is surely so."

"And you?"

Gulab Singh remained silent for a moment.

“It is in my mind, sahib,” he said slowly, “that the book as the sahib has told of it is like unto the one that has come down in the mouths of men since the time of Kana-ee-a. How, O sahib, could there be two such books?”

“True,” said Kenneth Wayne. “But, granting its existence in the first place, it’s incredible that it should turn up here after all these years.”

“Sahib,” said Gulab Singh gravely, “we travel upon the Wheel, and strange is Fate. What is written is written. If it be here that the *Kitab* should come again to the eyes of men, who shall gainsay it?”

“Oh, yes, that’s right enough, I suppose,” said Kenneth Wayne. “If it was ever to come to light again, it had to come to light *somewhere*. Well, anyway, the matter’s easily settled. It’s dark now, and there’s no use going back there to-night. If he heard us coming he’d probably only take to the woods again, and we’d never find him. I don’t know whether it was fear or fanatical fury that possessed him the more. We’ll go over in the morning and see if we can’t pacify the chap, and get him to let us have a look at the book. It is evident, at any rate, that to him it means only a sacred object of worship—a god of some sort, on account of the dragon, I fancy—for certainly it has not been opened.”

Gulab Singh inclined his head.

“It is well, sahib,” he said; “and as the sahib directs, so shall it be done.”

With a gesture, as though dismissing the entire matter, Kenneth Wayne turned away from the firelight.

“Bring me food, Gulab Singh,” he said, and walked back to his tent.

But the matter was not to be so easily dismissed. He could not shake it from his thoughts. It clung persistently. It was with him when he turned in for the night. He even summed it up aloud—rather unsatisfactorily—just before he fell asleep.

“Damned queer yarn, that!” said Kenneth Wayne to himself.



THE KEEPER OF THE BOOK

KENNETH WAYNE slept heavily—but not restfully. It was a night of dreams—a toilsome night. He worked very hard—Gulab Singh was a hard taskmaster. At first they went in a boat over a great expanse of water until they came to a gloomy and forbidding shore; and then they began to walk vast distances, now through almost impenetrable forests, now over what seemed unscalable mountain heights, and now through valleys and ravines, and now they crawled on hands and knees through long, dark caverns that went down into the bowels of the earth. And always Gulab Singh carried a book that had a dragon on it. And always they seemed to be followed though nothing took shape behind them. And sometimes they ran from this thing that followed them until he thought they had eluded it, and then he was conscious that it was still there and still watching them. And sometimes they overturned huge boulders and dug beneath them because Gulab Singh said it was written in the book that what they sought was there. But there was never anything beneath the boulders. And they went on, and on, and on, and always Gulab Singh's monstrous turban led the way, and always the stealthy, unseen thing that followed was near at hand. And finally, through a strange passage hewn out of solid rock, whose walls were of such enormous height that the top could not be seen, they came to a subterranean lagoon, and because the book was a magical talisman they could walk under the water; and here they came upon a magnificent chamber that was filled with chests of gold, and great heaps of jewelry and precious stones, and priceless cloths of great beauty, and wondrous treasures of all kinds. And Gulab Singh kept calling out to him to gather these together. But he did not do so because, looking down on them from above through the transparent water as through a window, he could see a man's face that was full of sardonic humour, a face that he knew—and then he knew who it was who had been following them because that was Crimson Sash up there. And Gulab Singh kept on calling out—calling out—calling out——

Kenneth Wayne sat suddenly upright. Gulab Singh was calling out. The turbaned head filled the entrance to the tent.

“Well, what’s up?” growled Kenneth Wayne sleepily. “It’s beastly early yet, isn’t it?”

“Sahib,” said Gulab Singh, “it is barely dawn, but I have ill news. In the night all the stores have been stolen. There remains nothing, even so much as I could carry in the hollow of my hand—only the boat.”

“What’s that!” exclaimed Kenneth Wayne sharply. He jumped to his feet and began to fling himself into his clothes. “All right,” he jerked out; “I’ll be there in a second!”

It was just getting light as he stepped outside the tent. The Malays, a little way off on the beach, seemed to be huddled together in an awe-struck, frightened group. Gulab Singh stood waiting for him a pace away. He stared into Gulab Singh’s face—it was nearer to showing emotion than he had ever thought it capable of—it mirrored a sort of helpless and dumfounded anxiety.

“Now, then!” he snapped. “You’re sure of this, Gulab Singh?”

Gulab Singh spread out his hands.

“The sahib has only to look,” he said. He bowed his head. “And, sahib, I am ashamed.”

“Never mind about that,” said Kenneth Wayne tersely. “When did you find it out?”

“But a little while ago, sahib, when I awoke. But first we searched in all directions before I brought the news to the sahib.”

“And the men, there—what do they say?”

“No man heard anything through the night, sahib. They say the place is accursed.”

“Accursed nothing!” said Kenneth Wayne savagely. “But it’s a bit thick—by God!” His eyes fell on the boat. “Left that, eh? And took all the provisions and stores! A rather broad hint, I’d say, to vacate the premises—what? Well, I don’t imagine we’ll have far to look for the thief, or the stores either. It’s probably that mad devotee whose shrine I violated yesterday; and he’s taken a very effective way of telling us he doesn’t want us around here.” He smiled grimly. “We’ll go over there a little earlier than we intended, Gulab Singh. In fact, we’ll *breakfast* with him, since we no longer have any of our own here.”

"It may well be that the sahib is right," said Gulab Singh earnestly. "Does the sahib mean that we go at once?"

"Yes—at once," Kenneth Wayne answered crisply.

"And the men, sahib—shall all go?"

"No," said Kenneth Wayne. "Leave one man here to look after what's left—my tent and belongings. Take all the rest—the fellow has probably hidden our things as well as himself, and there'll be a bit of searching to do. Come along, now! Follow me!"

He turned abruptly, and, striking into the woods, began to break his way through the thick belt of growth in the direction of the mad fanatic's hut. He was angry, incensed, and in no gentle mood. He was perfectly convinced that the mad fool was the author of the theft, but he was not at all convinced that he would ever see the man, or, what was far more vital, any of the stores again. If he were right, the man would keep under cover and the stores would be hidden with all a madman's craftiness. It was a serious matter. Without provisions he could not continue the trip, and it would be a case of going back to Salabam to replenish. It would not have been impossible, or even difficult, for one man to have got away with all the stores, given a night to do it in. Leaving out the tent and his, Kenneth Wayne's, personal baggage, there were only the provisions, and these consisted solely of the essentials and were in small, compact and not over-many packages—especially packed, in fact, to facilitate handling. There could be no question on that score. He swore aloud.

"Damn the old idiot and his infernal book!" he snarled angrily.

He broke through into the clearing. There was no smoke—no incense rising from the shrine this morning! Exactly what he had expected! The man had decamped. He heard the Malays chattering behind him. They were commenting on the same fact. And now Gulab Singh brought it to his attention.

"So, I see!" said Kenneth Wayne curtly. "And I've an idea breakfast isn't ready here, either." And then, still more curtly: "Make a dash for it! If he's there and hasn't seen us, don't give him a chance to get out of reach!"

He was running now with Gulab Singh and the Malays at his heels. He crossed the intervening space, watching as he ran, but saw no sign of life or movement from the hut. Then, panting and a little breathless, he drew up, not before the opening that evidenced the existence of what had once been a doorway, but at the rear where, with the walls and roof crumbled away, the

madman's shrine stood, as it were, in the open air, and such as might be called the interior of the wretched place was in full view.

And for a moment he stood still, his square jaw outthrust a little, his face hard, his lips drawn together in a tight, straight line. He heard a strange, quick grunt as though of mingled shock and abhorrence from Gulab Singh behind him; he heard a low flutter of exclamations from the little body of Malays. And then, without a word, he stepped forward into the hut.

It was not a pleasant sight. On the floor in a pool of blood lay the naked body of the mad fanatic. He stooped and touched the body. It was cold. The man had been dead at least several hours—been stabbed in half a dozen places. He stared at the other's face—he hadn't seen it clearly yesterday. The man wasn't pure Malay . . . there seemed to be a Mongolian cast to the features . . . the narrower eyes, the yellowish tinge to the skin . . . a man well past middle age. What difference did all that make? The man had been murdered.

His eyes, making a circuit of the hut now, rested on the two wooden idols. They had not been disturbed; they still extended their arms to each other—but the book with the brass dragon was gone.

The Malays, who had edged forward, drawn as if almost against their will by morbid curiosity, retreated again until they stood outside now, a little whispering crowd, with several yards between themselves and the hut.

Gulab Singh alone remained. He stood with folded arms, immovable, his eyes fixed on the huddled form on the floor.

Kenneth Wayne's eyes drifted to the knot of whispering Malays, and for a moment he studied them with a sort of cold deliberation; and then he turned abruptly and began a thorough and painstaking search of the hut. It was perhaps futile—he rather expected it would be—but it would at least set one doubt at rest. He dug out the rubbish from the corners with his hands, overturned the few miserable bits of mat that were strewn about the ground that made the floor, examined the floor itself, and then the rotting walls. There was no sign of the dragon-covered book.

He returned finally to where Gulab Singh stood. The man had not moved; but he raised his eyes now, and his lips twitched queerly as he spoke.

“Sahib,” he said hoarsely, “no man has said to Gulab Singh that he was a child to tremble or cry out with fear; but, sahib, it is in my mind that these men have spoken truth, and that this place is indeed accursed.”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne grimly, “there’s no doubt about it—it’s accursed with a damned murderer and a thief, and I’d give something to get my hands on the devil who did this! It was that book, of course, this chap was murdered for—and it’s gone, all right. And unless I miss my guess, it was some one, or all of those swine out there who are at the bottom of it.”

“Sahib,” cautioned Gulab Singh in a whisper, “do not speak so loud.”

“Why?” demanded Kenneth Wayne brusquely, but lowering his voice none the less. “Do any of them speak English?”

“I do not know, sahib. But it may well be that they have learned from the white men in Salabam perhaps this word or that—enough to bring evil upon the sahib. What is the sahib’s will? Shall search still be made here for the stores?”

“No,” said Kenneth Wayne tersely; “nor for the book—for neither are here. See that this poor devil is as decently disposed of as you can, and when it is done bring the men back to the camp. You will find me there.”

Gulab Singh bowed his head in assent.

“It is well, sahib,” he said.

The little group of Malays were watching intently. Kenneth Wayne was conscious of that, but without a glance in their direction he turned and left the hut by the opening in front, and started back toward the camp.

He wanted to think if he could—get his mind clear. It was clogged with the shock of that brutal and hideous thing that had been done back there. Malays! Malays, with their culture and religion and ethics and legends! His hands clenched. What would Mr. Merwood say to this? Who knew them the better? A Fellow of the Royal Society, or—or—No; that wasn’t fair. What had Mr. Merwood to do with this anyway? Mr. Merwood did not know Old Man Wayne. . . . The popular belief. . . . God in heaven! . . .

This wouldn’t do! This got him nowhere. It was one of the two Malays, or both of them, who had accompanied him to the hut yesterday evening, or all of them banded now together, wasn’t it?—their greed, their cupidity, their superstition, the worst that was in them, where theft and murder was a trade for generations, aroused by that book with its promise of riches, its fabled store of enormous wealth—and only an old madman to stab in the night in order to acquire it!

It wasn’t the old madman who had stolen the stores. The matter took on a very different complexion now. The theft and the murder both had almost

certainly been committed within his own party. There was only one alternative theory—that it was some one else. He laughed harshly aloud at himself. Brilliant! It sounded like the mouthing of a fool. But that was exactly what he meant—that perhaps a boat party had passed up or down the river in the night and—— But what would such a party know of the book or the old fanatic, and why should such a party have risked the invasion of the camp after the stores? It didn't ring true. Was it possible that others besides the maniac lived here? If so, why hadn't the maniac been murdered and the book taken long ago? That didn't ring true, either.

It came back, like running around a circle, to the Malays. They possessed the motive, the opportunity, and a hideous eagerness of character for just such bloody and abominable work. It was the Malays. There remained no doubt in his mind.

The theft of the book, the theft of the stores, the murder of the old madman were all of a piece. Having stolen the book, they didn't want to spend ten days or two weeks rowing up and down the coast when treasure greater than they had ever dreamed of was theirs somewhere else for the taking.

Naturally! They wanted to end the trip—and taking the supplies would end it very effectually! They were clever enough to do it that way. To desert would have invited suspicion; but to disband at Salabam and refuse to start off again when the stores were replenished on the score of the white man taking them to places that were accursed, and all that sort of fetish that they could get away with, was too characteristic of a native to arouse, ordinarily, even comment.

But they wouldn't get away with it if he could help it! His hands clenched tightly again. These were the brothers and the kin and the ilk of those fiends out of hell who had swarmed the deck of the *Waratan* that night. God, if there were only a machine gun for these too, and——

His passion was rising. No use in that! He forced coolness back upon himself.

He had no proof.

He mulled over this factor of the problem for a space. And then a smile came—not a pleasant smile. Perhaps that proof wasn't so hard to obtain, after all! And if he got that proof, perhaps he'd have his stores back at the same time. No—hardly! He'd have the lot of them at his throat. Well, even so! The trip was at an end, in any case. There wasn't any use inaugurating a

search for the stores that the searchers themselves did not intend should be found. He might as well dismiss all thought of them utterly from his mind. They were gone—and that was the end of it. But it was quite a different matter with that book.

Itu Konchi-kan Kitab! The Locked Book! It was not a question of whether he believed in it or not—as a matter of fact, he wasn't at all sure what he believed. But the *natives* believed in it—had murdered for it—would murder again for it if necessary. And the point was that, once it was in their possession, they weren't likely to let it get very far away from them again!

He came out on the beach, and without a word to the lone Malay who had been left to guard the camp, he went down to the boat and swung himself over the gunwale. He searched every inch of her, ransacked through every locker, and lifted every grating. The boat was absolutely empty.

The Malay eyed him askance. Kenneth Wayne, grim-lipped, got out of the boat at the end of his search, and sat down on the sand, his back against the boat's bow.

He sat there for a long time. Finally he heard the men returning, breaking their way through the trees. And then, Gulab Singh at their head, they appeared on the beach.

Kenneth Wayne rose to his feet, but he did not move away from the boat. His hand was in the side pocket of his coat.

“Gulab Singh,” he called out sharply, “let the men strike that tent, and bring my things down here to the boat!”

“Yes, sahib,” Gulab Singh answered.

Kenneth Wayne was smiling again—and again not pleasantly—as, a few minutes later, the Malays, carrying the tent and his personal effects, all that was left from the raid upon the camp, trooped down the beach to the boat.

“Tell them to put the things here on the sand, Gulab Singh,” directed Kenneth Wayne evenly; and then, as he was obeyed: “Now tell them to stand in line—and strip!”

There was a sullen murmur as Gulab Singh translated the order. Kenneth Wayne's hand came from his pocket, and, outflung, pointed a revolver.

“Strip!” he rasped in English.

They began to obey slowly, angrily.

“It is well, sahib,” said Gulab Singh impassively, “that I should do likewise.”

Kenneth Wayne nodded curtly.

Seven naked men stood before him.

He bit his lip. There was no sign of the book with the dragon cover.

“Tell them to dress again, put the things in the boat, and shove off, Gulab Singh,” he said harshly. “We’ll get back to Salabam.”

He turned his back upon them and clambered into the stern of the boat under the awning, his jaws clamped hard. There was no sign of the book, but he had scored at any rate. They had not expected an abrupt departure such as this. That was the obvious explanation. They had hidden the book somewhere, not daring to carry it around on their persons and concealed in the few clothes they wore, but they had not counted on having no opportunity to *retrieve* it before leaving the place. And since it wasn’t hidden in the boat—he’d made sure of that!—they would come back for it—*if they could!* Well, that remained to be seen! Was there any other possible explanation? Yes—one. They might never have found it themselves after murdering the old fanatic. The old fanatic, fearful for its safety after what had happened last evening, might have hidden it himself before he was attacked. Well, in that case also they would come back to make a further search for it—*if they could!*

The boat was pushed off. The Malays took sullenly to the oars. Kenneth Wayne did not recline on his back now under the awning. He sat upright with his hand in the side pocket of his coat.

Gulab Singh, squatting in the little cockpit, turned his head.

“They are very angry, sahib,” he said in a low voice. “But also they are afraid, though we be but two to six. Will the sahib make report of this thing in Salabam?”

“That’s what I am going back for,” Kenneth Wayne answered shortly—and added in grim facetiousness: “That—and breakfast.”

—XI—

MAJOR PETERS OF SALABAM

THE MALAYS pulled sullenly at the oars. That they pulled at all was because, when their lowering glances lifted, the white man under the awning always had his hand in the pocket of his coat. They muttered to themselves. At times their murmurings rose in unison and became like the ugly snarling of a beast as it shows its teeth. But their physical defiance lay only in the apathy with which they laboured. The boat made slow progress. It was the middle of the afternoon when it reached Salabam.

As it grounded on the beach, Kenneth Wayne nodded curtly to Gulab Singh, and motioned with an outflung hand toward the boat's crew.

"Warn them again to stay where they are," he said tersely; "and then get Major Peters down here as quickly as you can."

"Yes, sahib."

Gulab Singh repeated the order, and, getting out of the boat, hurried across the beach and disappeared behind the trees that fringed the road in front of the town.

Kenneth Wayne in turn stepped out on the beach, and stood a few paces off watching the six men. They were morosely obedient to the command not to leave their seats, but there was now added to the sullen behaviour they had exhibited since leaving the camp that morning an obvious uneasiness. They moved about restlessly, casting furtive glances at him, glancing from one to another, glancing apprehensively across the beach in the direction taken by Gulab Singh. Their mutterings were low, angry, confused—and these, if he approached at all nearer to the boat, ceased entirely and gave place to still darker looks. He could catch nothing of what they said, but it could be readily understood for all that: "What was the white man going to do?"

Perhaps ten minutes elapsed, and then a tall, angular figure in white, which Kenneth Wayne recognised as that of Major Peters, appeared through the fringe of trees, and, followed by Gulab Singh, came down across the beach to the boat.

“Sorry to have knocked you up, Major Peters,” said Kenneth Wayne quietly, as the other halted before him. “Think perhaps you were having your afternoon sleep, but there’s a bit of bad business here that had to be reported.”

Major Peters had a thin face and deeply-socketed black eyes, and these now in turn stared ungraciously from Kenneth Wayne to the Malays in the boat and back to Kenneth Wayne again.

“Humph!” he said testily. “A bit of bad business, eh? I must say, Mr. Wayne, that you’re something of a bird of ill omen. You only arrived the day before yesterday, and yesterday you bring me the report of an attempted murder; and to-day you’re back again, according to this fellow here”—he jerked a thumb in the direction of Gulab Singh—“with the tale of the killing of some wild man down along the coast.”

Mentally, Kenneth Wayne had already, from his previous meeting, classified the other as an irritable brute. He reiterated that opinion now—mentally. He did not like the man; but the sallow skin spoke eloquently of liver, as he had before noted, and in the tropics much is forgiven—the liver.

“Sorry again, sir,” said Kenneth Wayne a little tartly; “but in your official position——”

“Well, well!” interrupted Major Peters. “What’s the story, and what have these men got to do with it?”

Briefly, Kenneth Wayne recounted the facts.

“Humph!” grunted Major Peters at the end. “Saw the wild man and the book, found the wild man murdered next morning, the book gone and also your stores; searched these men and found nothing. That’s it in a nutshell, I take it?”

The man was dictatorial, his tone brusque almost to offensiveness. Kenneth Wayne’s lips tightened.

“Oh, quite!” he said.

Major Peters pushed his pith helmet back on his head, and mopped with a handkerchief at his brow.

“Well,” he snapped, “what, exactly, do you want me to do about it?”

“That is for you to say,” returned Kenneth Wayne. “Personally, I believe they’ve got the book hidden back there somewhere, and will return for it at the first opportunity.”

“Arrest them, or keep them under surveillance, I suppose, is what you mean,” said Major Peters gruffly. “Well, in the first place, Salabam is endowed with neither a jail nor a police force; and, furthermore, if you knew the natives as well as I do, sir, you would at once see the futility of any such a course. I’ve heard of that book—everybody who has lived in this section of the Archipelago has, as a matter of course—but it is what we call at home a nursery tale and——”

“These chaps, however, believe it, right enough,” Kenneth Wayne cut in dryly.

“Precisely what I am driving at,” said Major Peters curtly. “So much so, in fact, that, having once seen what they believe to be the actually existent book itself, they’d go to any length to get it. But what good would it do to arrest these men, or watch them, even if it were possible? They’ve all got innumerable relatives in the settlement here, and as the mouth of the river is quite accessible by land, they’d only pass the word out and the place would be visited just the same, and, if your theory is correct, the book taken from its hiding place in any case. I can’t mount guard over the Cheruchuk River. You can see the absurdity of such an idea.”

Kenneth Wayne selected a cigarette from his case, and lighted it. Major Peters was not without reason; it was the man’s manner, the utter lack of cordiality, that rubbed the wrong way and invited retort.

“Preposterous, of course!” he murmured with a thin smile. “But, just the same, it seems to me something ought to be done.”

“Damn it!” exploded Major Peters. “I don’t like your tone, sir! Are you insinuating that I do not know my duty, or, knowing it, am not anxious to perform it?”

“Never entered my head,” said Kenneth Wayne blandly. “I was merely thinking that I had most unaccountably lost all my stores.”

Major Peters glared.

“I have already explained to you,” he said angrily, “that the physical means at my disposal of upholding authority are extremely limited; but I want to say to you, sir, that, by God, they would be exercised, such as they are, to the fullest possible extent whenever such action were warranted. Have you any proof against these men?”

Kenneth Wayne shrugged his shoulders. There was no use in prolonging the conversation. It was now up to Major Peters—that was all.

“None,” he said. “I thought the matter should be brought to your attention—and I have done so. The rest is in your hands.” He turned to Gulab Singh. “Bring my things up to the hotel, Gulab Singh,” he ordered; and then, with a nod to Major Peters: “Good afternoon, sir.”

Major Peters returned the salutation with a mechanical grunt.

Kenneth Wayne started toward the hotel. Halfway across the beach he looked back. Gulab Singh had shouldered the bags and belongings, and was following him. The Malays had climbed out of the boat, and, surrounding Major Peters, were gesticulating and chattering excitedly. Kenneth Wayne smiled a little grimly. What satisfaction there was in the whole affair was there. Major Peters’ irritability was not in the way of being appeased! Rather meagre satisfaction, though—with stores gone, and the trip worse than a failure!

He gained the road, and continued on toward the hotel. It was only a short distance. Dorothy Merwood and her father, he could see, were on the front of the verandah. He looked back once more. Gulab Singh was still following a little way behind; and Major Peters, who had now reached the road, was still surrounded by the group of Malays—only there seemed to be more of these latter now than the original six who had composed the boat’s crew. And again Kenneth Wayne smiled. He wished Major Peters a very pleasant afternoon!

From the railing above, Dorothy Merwood waved her hand, and, as he bowed in return, called out excitedly:

“Why, Mr. Wayne, whatever brings you back? Do come up here at once and tell us!”

“Coming, Miss Merwood!” he called back smilingly.

Two stairways led to the second story of the hotel, opening on opposite sides of the verandah. He took the nearer one in order to pass Dorothy Merwood and her father on the way to his room. As he turned the corner of the verandah, she rose from her chair to meet him.

“It isn’t possible, is it,” she asked a little breathlessly, “that you have already found just what you were looking for? I do hope you have though! What wonderful luck that would be!”

He smiled gravely as he shook hands with her, and, in turn, with Mr. Merwood—and nodded curtly to a man who had risen from a chair beside the one Dorothy Merwood had been occupying. It was Mr. Walters, the Englishman from the cloth house in Manchester.

“Mr. Wayne—Mr. Walters,” said Dorothy Merwood.

Both of Kenneth Wayne’s hands were occupied—with match-box and cigarette case. He nodded again.

“Glad to meet you—not being in the same line of business,” said Mr. Walters effusively—and laughed at his own idea of humour. “Can’t cut into the other chap, you see,” he explained, finding that no one echoed his laugh. And then, without change of inflexion in his voice, but with something in the eyes beneath the drooping, over-puffy lids that was curiously snake-like: “You’re the mining chap that’s come out after the gold, Miss Merwood says.”

“Yes,” said Dorothy Merwood quickly; “and he hasn’t answered my question yet.” She turned to Kenneth Wayne. “Did you find it?”

Kenneth Wayne shook his head slowly.

“I’m afraid it’s the other way around, Miss Merwood,” he replied. “Instead of finding anything, I’ve lost about everything I started out with. All the stores were stolen last night.”

“Stolen!” ejaculated Mr. Merwood.

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne; “and, on top of that, a bit of ugly business connected with the murder of a mad fanatic we found worshipping a book that, according to Gulab Singh, is the original of some legend built around an ancient piratical chief named Kana-ee-a.”

“What’s that!” exclaimed Mr. Merwood in sudden excitement. “I know that tale! They call the book the *Itu Konchi-kan Kitab*—The Locked Book. Perfectly amazing! You don’t mean to say it’s actually come to light! Good heavens, man, where is it? I’d give my head to authenticate a thing like that!”

“Gone—like the stores,” said Kenneth Wayne. “But here’s Gulab Singh with all that’s left of my possessions. He can tell you more about it than I can.”

“Yes!” cried Mr. Merwood eagerly, as Gulab Singh appeared around the corner of the verandah. “Come here, Gulab Singh!”

Gulab Singh unshouldered his burdens, laid them down on the verandah, and salaamed gravely.

Mr. Merwood fell to questioning the man, his excitement constantly growing; while Mr. Walters from Manchester became an intimate listener,

standing close to the cot. But Dorothy Merwood's interest was suddenly elsewhere. She touched Kenneth Wayne on the arm, and pointed down along the street.

"Look at Major Peters!" she said. "Whatever is the matter, do you suppose? He seems to have every native in Salabam at his heels."

Kenneth Wayne looked. It was almost literally true. Out of the nucleus formed by the original six of the boat's crew had grown a surging crowd, that not only overflowed the road, but entirely surrounded Major Peters until all that was to be seen of the man was a bobbing white helmet above a sea of dark heads. The crowd gesticulated and talked as it came scuffling on toward the hotel; and the sound of many voices, reaching now to the verandah, was like the buzzing of a swarm of angry bees.

There was a grim twist to Kenneth Wayne's lips.

"It looks as though Major Peters wasn't through with the thing after all," he said.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Well," he said, "I am pretty well convinced that some, or all of my crew are guilty on every one of three counts—the murder of that mad fanatic, the theft of my stores, and the theft of that book. I sent for Major Peters the moment the boat reached the beach here and told him what had happened. He seemed to think there wasn't any proof to go on, in which, to be honest, I have to agree with him more or less, and that he couldn't do anything under the circumstances—in which I do not agree at all. As I say, it's rather evident, however, that he hasn't washed his hands entirely of the affair, though what's up now is beyond me."

Dorothy Merwood was staring down into the road in a perturbed way now.

"The natives seem to be very angry," she said a little uneasily. "And they seem to be coming here. Look, some of them are pointing at us now!"

"At me, I imagine," corrected Kenneth Wayne quietly.

"But why?" she asked in a quick, low way.

There was something in her voice, an unconscious earnestness, a strange dismay that made him turn and look at her. He caught his breath. It was all over—come and gone in the fleeting of an instant—just a troubled something in the wide blue eyes, a fear not for herself. And in that instant she seemed as one who, hidden from him before, stood suddenly revealed,

and he knew an amazement that set his pulse to throbbing at the golden beauty of her with her fair face uplifted and the sun upon her hair to make it shine in strands of burnished copper.

And he stumbled for his words.

“I do not know,” he said.

Mr. Merwood had ceased his questioning of Gulab Singh, and the little group around the cot was now, too, staring down upon the road.

“Oh, I say!” ejaculated Mr. Walters from Manchester. “What’s all the bally row about?”

With a mental wrench, Kenneth Wayne pulled himself together. He glanced at the speaker, his lips suddenly tight. Mr. Walters was *very* English—in expression!

No one made any answer.

The crowd of natives had halted in front of the hotel now, packing the road in a solid mass; and now, in a sort of ugly and expectant silence, stood staring up at the verandah. And from different directions, from the beach, from the opposite ends of the road, stragglers, men, women and children, came running, merging with the outskirts of the crowd, swelling it.

And then Mr. Walters from Manchester answered his own question.

“There’s trouble here,” he said uncomfortably, his puffy eyes contracted; “and it’s got a nasty look to it—eh, what?—by Jove!”

—XII—

THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW

KENNETH WAYNE stepped to the verandah rail, and, leaning over, saw the boat's crew detach itself from the rest of the crowd, and followed by Major Peters enter the hotel. The next instant he faced around again, his puzzled expression deepened, as from somewhere in the interior of the hotel below came Monsieur Nicholas Fouché's voice shouting in strident tones:

"*Mille diables!* What is this—eh? What is this? Out of here, '*cré nom!* I do not allow natives in here!"

It was Major Peters' voice that answered in equally sharp tones:

"Then you'll make an exception to your rule to-day, Monsieur Fouché!"

"Oh, pardon, monsieur!" Monsieur Nicholas Fouché's voice underwent an instant change. It became at once ingratiating and apologetic. "I did not see monsieur. But certainly, monsieur, they shall enter—as many as you wish."

Footsteps sounded on the stairs—the patter of bare feet, the heavier tread of shoes. Then Major Peters appeared on the verandah, the six men of the boat's crew behind him, and in the rear Monsieur Nicholas Fouché, his little black eyes darting amazed and curious glances in all directions.

Major Peters lifted his pith helmet, obviously in a purely mechanical concession to the amenities as his eyes rested for an instant on Dorothy Merwood, then he stepped directly up to Kenneth Wayne.

"Well," he snapped out, "I trust you're satisfied, Mr. Wayne! You've stirred up a regular hornets' nest." Major Peters removed his helmet once more, this time to mop again and again at a heated brow. "A hornets' nest, sir!" he repeated. "And, let me tell you, they're in a deucedly ugly temper!"

"I grant you the latter," said Kenneth Wayne coolly; "but I am afraid I cannot quite see where my responsibility for all this"—he waved his hand toward the road—"excitement comes in."

"I've had occasion once already this afternoon to tell you that you apparently know nothing of the native character," said Major Peters harshly. "You stripped these six men here naked—er, pardon me, Miss Merwood, but there's no other word for it—naked, didn't you?"

"I did," said Kenneth Wayne laconically; "and Gulab Singh with them."

"And you have accused them of murder and theft?"

"In a strictly legal sense, no," replied Kenneth Wayne. "But, virtually, I suppose I have, since I told you I believed, as I may say I still believe, that they are guilty."

"Exactly!" said Major Peters gruffly. "And thereby you have forced a very unpleasant duty upon me—a very unpleasant one. They say that you saw this so-called Locked Book even before they did, that you even had it in your possession, and that you know all about the story connected with it."

Kenneth Wayne stared.

"Look here!" said he curtly. "Would you mind telling me just what you are driving at, sir?"

"I am not *driving* at anything, Mr. Wayne," said Major Peters stiffly. "My language, I fancy, is fairly clear and direct. You have placed the onus of a crime upon these men. They reply that you were equally in a position, and equally possessed of the same incentive to commit the crime yourself; and that, while each and every one of them was searched for the evidence of that crime, you alone were not. Is that plain enough, Mr. Wayne?"

For a moment Kenneth Wayne gazed helplessly into the other's face—then he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Good God!" he gasped. "You mean, you want to search *me* for that book? You're joking, sir!"

Major Peters motioned toward the sullen, working faces of the six Malays behind him, and with a sweep of his hand indicated the tense, up-staring mob in the road below.

"Does it look like a joke?" he demanded grimly. "It doesn't to me. Yes, that is precisely what they want—and they must be satisfied for the sake of every white resident in this town. If this isn't settled, they'll get out of hand, and I would not care to invite the consequences. But quite apart from that, there is no more than justice and fair play in their demand. Have you any objection to a search being made?"

“Not in the slightest!” said Kenneth Wayne caustically. “Though I think it’s a bit of a gratuitous insult, and that, if you had wanted to, you could have nipped this idiotic demand in the bud down there before you left the beach. Shall I begin by turning my pockets out, sir; or will you have some of those wily chaps at your back paw my stuff over first—it’s all there in front of you just as it came up from the boat. Or perhaps”—he paused significantly—“you would prefer to do it yourself?”

Major Peters flushed. He had never “pawed” any man’s things over in his life.

“We will begin with the luggage,” he said evenly. He glanced around him tentatively, and as his eyes fell upon Mr. Walters he coughed slightly. “Mr. Walters,” he said, “will you be good enough to open those bags on the floor there so that everybody may see the contents?”

“With pleasure,” said Mr. Walters from Manchester promptly. “Er”—hastily, as he caught Kenneth Wayne’s eye—“that is—er—I mean anything to oblige.”

Kenneth Wayne smiled.

“That’s quite understood, Mr. Walters,” he said softly. “It’s perfectly jolly well all right. In fact, it’s *quite* all right!”

Mr. Walters from Manchester missed the fling. He got down on his knees and began to open the kit bag.

Kenneth Wayne watched the other. He was possessed of two impulses that were extremely hard to restrain. One to apply the toe of his boot to an objective now most conveniently and temptingly displayed; the other to jam the smug face, now peering into the bag, down in amongst the contents and then close the bag around the other’s neck. But the next instant the impulses were swept away in a whirl of conflicting emotion—and in mingled amazement, incredulity, a surge of passionate anger and a sense of childish helplessness, he felt the colour leave his cheeks.

A cry burst from the natives on the verandah:

“Itu Konchi-kan Kitab! . . . Itu Konchi-kan Kitab!”

It was taken up by the crowd below, that pushed and struggled and surged now as each of its individual units strove for a better vantage point:

“Itu Konchi-kan Kitab! . . . Itu Konchi-kan Kitab!”

Mr. Walters from Manchester was holding up “The Locked Book” which he had extracted from the kit bag.

Kenneth Wayne stared at it. There wasn’t any mistake. He wasn’t dreaming. It wasn’t an hallucination. It was the book, right enough, that the mad fanatic had snatched out of his hands. The brass dragon on the cover was a damned and hideous looking thing! And those devils behind Major Peters glared a bit, didn’t they!

Major Peters, with a command for silence to the boat’s crew on the verandah, took the book, stepped to the rail, and held it up for those in the road to see. This brought forth a renewed outburst, but it also had the effect of pacifying them into quiet a moment later, as he harangued them in the vernacular, demanding order. He turned to Kenneth Wayne.

“So!” he said sternly. “It seems——”

“Let me see it!” Mr. Merwood was leaning forward from the cot, his outstretched hand trembling with excitement. “Amazing! Dumbfounding! Gracious heavens, Major Peters, fancy a thing like this coming to light! A priceless contribution, sir, to our present knowledge of the Malay erudition of half a century or more ago—and unique in the annals of any race; substantiating traditions, sir, and all that sort of thing! Let me see it, man! Let me see it!”

Major Peters frowned, hesitated, then handed the book to Mr. Merwood.

“Your viewpoint and mine, Mr. Merwood,” he said tartly, “appear to be somewhat apart! I cannot lose sight of the fact that a man has been brutally murdered for that book, and that the most serious consequences attach to another in whose possession it has just been found.”

Mr. Merwood did not reply. He perhaps did not hear. He was engaged in an eager examination of the book, his eyes alight and burning with a feverish, ardent fire.

Major Peters turned again to Kenneth Wayne.

“So!” he repeated. “It seems these men were right. What have you to say?”

Kenneth Wayne’s eyes travelled from Major Peters to the group of six Malays, and held steadily for a moment on each face in turn. And on each face he read a vicious, ugly greed, a sinister and murderous lust. But not one of them was looking at him. Their eyes, as though held by a common magnet, were one and all centred on the book in Mr. Merwood’s hands. And

then his glance met Major Peters' again. The shock of the thing was over. He was quite in command of himself once more.

"There's only one explanation," he said calmly. "One of those fellows must have put the thing where you found it."

"Really!" said Major Peters icily. "And why, may I ask?"

"To hide it, of course. Afraid they'd be searched—as they were."

"Indeed!" Major Peters' voice was still more frigid. "And so, then, they committed a murder in order to obtain this book, then hid it in order to get away with it—and then insisted on their own hiding place being searched with the inevitable consequence that they would thereby lose possession of it! I had hoped for something better than that from you, sir. Something that, in a measure at least, might exonerate you, instead of damning you utterly out of your own mouth."

"But good Lord above, Major Peters," exclaimed Kenneth Wayne, "you can't think I did it! I'd never heard of the beastly legend before, though everybody else seems to have known all about it. It wasn't any priceless find to me!"

"You may never have heard of it prior to the first time you saw it," said Major Peters sharply. "That is quite possible. I do not know where you came from, or where you have lived. These legends are often more or less localised. In this section of the Archipelago this legend is known to every native from childhood; whereas on the Peninsula, for instance, it might be quite probable that it is scarcely known at all. But that is not the point. The point is that, according to your own story to me, you knew all about the legend and the enormous value attributed to the book *before* the murder was committed."

"But this is preposterous!" Kenneth Wayne burst out.

"That is the second time this afternoon you have used that expression," observed Major Peters bitinglly.

"Yes!" cried Kenneth Wayne hotly. "And I repeat it! It's preposterous! Do you mean to say that I stole out in the middle of the night and murdered that old madman, and then stole back and hid the book in my bag? And I suppose I stole my own stores, too!"

"*Some one* stole out in the night and murdered that old madman," said Major Peters evenly. "And the theft of the stores, no matter how or by whom

committed, does not appear to me to affect the fact that the book *has* been found in your bag.”

“Good God!” Kenneth Wayne’s hands clenched at his sides. “Then why did I search these natives? And why did I come back and lay information voluntarily before you?”

“Because I think you are rather clever—in a low way.” There was ill-concealed contempt in Major Peters’ voice now. “The report of the murder was bound to come out—all these men would spread the news. Under the circumstances, I should say that a guilty man with any brains would believe his safest move was to forestall the story, especially when he could lodge an accusation elsewhere that, even without proof, would sound plausible in view of the fact that it was directed against some defenceless natives of whom anything was likely to be believed. What you evidently did not count on was a countercharge and a dose of your own medicine. As it is now, I have no choice but to believe the story these men tell, and——”

“Been a long time in the—hic!—islands,” broke in a voice suddenly. “Never heard of a native’s word being taken against a—hic!—white man’s before.”

Kenneth Wayne, as did Major Peters, turned sharply in the direction of the voice. Glover, the beachcomber, his scarecrow and dishevelled appearance enhanced by a dirty bandage tied around his head and upon which his pith helmet was ludicrously and precariously perched, was leaning against the wall, staring around with owl-like gravity upon the assemblage.

“Ah!” exclaimed Major Peters angrily, with a glance at Kenneth Wayne. “I see you have an ally! One of our most respectable citizens! Quite the right sort to be of service to you, too. A friend of yours, I take it! This is the man you said some one tried to murder the night before last, didn’t you?”

“Look here,” said Kenneth Wayne in a low, tense voice, “so far I’ve respected your official position—and your age. But there’s a certain amount of decent consideration due to any man, and I’m going to tell you now that if you propose to act like a cur I shall feel free to treat you as one literally.”

“Threats will not help your case, sir!” retorted Major Peters furiously. “You are getting all the consideration you deserve. And as for you”—he whirled on Glover—“I will not tolerate your drunken interference!”

“’S ’all right!” said Glover. He waved his arm grandiloquently. “Been a long time in the—hic!—islands. Never heard of a native’s word being taken against a—hic!—white man’s before.”

“It is not a question of any man’s word,” rasped Major Peters. “It is a question of evidence of the most damning character. That book——”

“It’s undoubtedly authentic,” announced Mr. Merwood in an absorbed way. “Kana-ee-a’s beyond question. Amazing! But I cannot open it. It’s most ingeniously locked. One of the most interesting features about it—the tail fused in the dragon’s mouth. I think a file will be the best thing. Will some one please get me a file?”

Major Peters stepped over to the cot and took the book somewhat brusquely from the scientist’s hands.

“I will take charge of this,” he said with finality. “And it will not be opened with a file or anything else, Mr. Merwood, until it is opened by the proper authorities in court. This is no longer a book whose antiquity may be interesting, or whose contents may be an ‘open sesame’ to great wealth; it is a piece of evidence to be preserved precisely in the condition in which it has been found until such time as it is in the hands of those qualified to deal with it on that basis. Meanwhile, it makes not the slightest difference what the book actually contains; the motive for the murder that has been committed still remains in the presumption that the book *does* contain the information with which it is credited.”

Mr. Merwood’s eyes lingered on the book regretfully.

“Too bad!” he murmured. “Too bad! A glance, a mere glance inside would have outweighed all the work I have already done. But I suppose you are right, Major Peters—h’m—er—yes, couldn’t do otherwise, naturally.”

Mutterings, voices beginning to rise impatiently, a stir and movement in the crowd below, took Major Peters to the verandah rail for the second time. Once more he commanded order, and holding up the book again in corroboration of his words, announced that it would remain safe and unopened in his hands until all should have been justly dealt with by the law of the Great White Rajah across the seas.

The crowd stood mute again, gazing upward.

Major Peters turned and faced Kenneth Wayne once more.

“Have you anything to say?” he demanded. “Any further explanation to give? Anything to offer in your defence?”

“Simply,” replied Kenneth Wayne steadily, “that I know nothing about how that book got into my bag.”

“That is all?”

“That’s all.”

Major Peters cleared his throat.

“The situation,” he said gruffly, “is, I am well aware, somewhat incongruous. I am vested with the powers of a magistrate, and my duty demands that I should exercise those powers to the best of my ability, and in view of the evidence I must place you under arrest for murder, pending the time when you can be sent from here for trial. As I informed you this afternoon, this little town has no jail—we have never until now, thank God, in any such way as this, required one—nor have we any police, though every man resident here is legally qualified to act as an officer of the law if so deputed by me. I shall therefore order Monsieur Fouché to lock you in your room until we can make more adequate dispositions concerning you.” He turned and nodded curtly to the hotel proprietor. “You understand, Monsieur Fouché?”

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché came forward, and bowed in his best hotel style. He needed only a napkin over his arm.

“*Parfaitement, monsieur,*” he said.

“And a word of warning to you, Wayne!” Major Peters clipped off his words. “If you are tempted to make light of an hotel room because it has neither steel doors nor barred windows, I want to tell you that it is far safer, and particularly so for your own person, than you may perhaps imagine. You cannot leave this island in any case. Every white resident here will be informed of what has happened—they will respect the law if you do not, and if you attempt to break loose you will receive a short shrift at their hands. And as for the natives, you have had ample evidence this afternoon of their feelings and temper toward you. I hope I have made this clear?”

Kenneth Wayne looked around him. Glover, the beachcomber, was making his way somewhat unsteadily along the verandah in the direction of the stairs—the bar, probably, as his objective. Mr. Walters from Manchester, smiling smugly, hurriedly composed his features and turned his head away as Kenneth Wayne’s glance fell upon him. Mr. Merwood did not look up. The Malays were merely ugly and malicious. Dorothy Merwood had walked a few yards away, and was standing at the verandah rail looking down at the crowd below, her back turned.

“Quite clear, thank you!” said Kenneth Wayne in a monotone. “Gulab Singh, take my things to my room!”

He swung on his heel and started along the verandah—but opposite Dorothy Merwood he paused.

She turned slowly around and faced him. There was a heightened colour in her cheeks, but the blue eyes were very steady—coldly so.

“I am very sorry for you, Mr. Wayne,” she said without inflexion in her voice.

“Good God!” he said in a low way. “You, too?”

“Too?” Her eyebrows lifted slightly. “Is there any reason why I——”

“No,” he said bitterly. “None.” And went on again along the verandah.

Monsieur Fouché, his jailor, fell into step behind him.

“*Sacré nom!*” said Monsieur Fouché confidentially. “I am not a policeman. You understand that, eh, monsieur? *C’est évident!*”

Kenneth Wayne made no reply.

Nicky Fouché lowered his voice. There was suggestion in it.

“It was hard luck, monsieur. Godam, it was hard luck—a hundred fortunes in your hand!”

Kenneth Wayne stared at the other levelly for an instant.

“You go to hell!” said Kenneth Wayne.

—XIII—

A MATTER OF KEYS

IT had grown dark, but Kenneth Wayne had not lighted the lamp in his room. Hours ago—at least it seemed hours ago—Monsieur Nicholas Fouché in person had brought in the evening meal. Monsieur Fouché had been gruff and unfriendly. Perhaps he, Kenneth Wayne, had not been altogether tactful in his treatment of the Frenchman on the way to “jail.” Perhaps not; but at least he had refrained from bashing in the fellow’s face—which, under the circumstances, was saying a good deal for his self-restraint. Since Monsieur Fouché’s departure he had alternately sat on the edge of his bed, as he sat now, like a prisoner in a veritable cell, or paced, in moments of restlessness, up and down within the narrow confines of his room.

There was a farcical side to it. Monsieur Fouché had locked the door and secured the window in some fashion, but a well directed kick would demolish in short order any of the flimsy fastenings that barred the way to freedom. The whole thing, Major Peters and his authority and his means of enforcing the majesty of the law, this hotel room as a prison cell, and all the rest of it, smacked of the opera-bouffé. And yet, if there was a farcical side to it, there was also one in which there was neither humour nor room for derision. Major Peters, with such means as were at his command to enforce his orders, was in deadly earnest. It was not Major Peters’ fault that there were neither jail nor police. There were perhaps not more than twenty-five or thirty whites on the entire island; and these, as it were, represented the law through a sort of community of interest—the natives, in the main, of course, being governed by their headmen.

His thoughts reverted to a conversation he had had with Mr. Merwood yesterday morning while waiting to start away on his trip. Mr. Merwood had got off on the topic of Salabam itself, and Mr. Merwood’s remarks in reference thereto seemed peculiarly pertinent now. They explained a great deal. Salabam was, so to speak, a place decadent. When first settled years before it had shown promise of a prosperous future, and in the initial flush of enthusiasm this hotel, for instance, had been built; but the place was too

isolated and too unimportant to make it profitable as a regular port of call for ships, there had been great trouble with labour, the plantations had not proved overly productive, and Salabam, instead of growing, had gradually dwindled to its present insignificant status of mere existence. And it had erected, as Mr. Merwood put it, numerous monuments to its blasted hopes. There were, for example, plantation bungalows back in the interior long since boarded up and deserted by those who, not having invested their all, could still shake the dust of the place from off their feet. The hotel itself was yet another example. It had become no more than a collection of empty rooms, save for those occupied by a few permanent boarders. Long a white elephant on its owner's hands, Monsieur Nicholas Fouché, an event in himself because he was comparatively a newcomer, had acquired it for a pittance less than a year ago. No one came to Salabam. It drowsed its life away in a deadly monotony that was rarely disturbed.

That brought the circle around to Major Peters and his authority again. And it accounted very adequately for the locked door and barred window of an hotel room! But, all this apart, what now? For the hundredth time the same question came hammering back at Kenneth Wayne's brain. What was he going to do? Break out of here—or stay cooped up, because he respected the law, and wait with what patience and equanimity he could until such time as some ship came in and bore him away to stand trial for murder?

Murder! Good Lord. He jumped to his feet and began to pace the room again. *He* was accused of murder! The accusation still brought a stunned amazement—as though it were something that he had dreamed had happened to him. Only he hadn't dreamed it at all. It was most damnably true. And the worst of it was that the more he thought of it the more conclusive the evidence against him appeared to be. Major Peters flicked a bit upon the raw and wasn't exactly what one would call a likeable chap, but he, Kenneth Wayne, was willing to admit in common honesty now, that Major Peters had not only been warranted in making the arrest, but, indeed, could not very well have acted otherwise.

His mind began to wrestle anew with the problem that it had already wrestled with for the last few hours. What did it mean? There were three possible theories—he could think of only three.

If it were the Malays who had committed the murder and stolen the book, it was almost certainly the fellow that had been left alone in camp that morning who had placed the book in the kit bag. The man would have had ample opportunity for doing so; and the man, he remembered, was one of the original two who had accompanied him on the previous evening to the

mad fanatic's hut where the book had been seen for the first time. But if the Malays had committed the murder—and there could have been no other motive on their part but to obtain possession of the book—why had they, or one of them, as Major Peters had pointed out, placed the book in the kit bag in the first place, and demanded that a search be made in the second? The answer he had made to Major Peters in the heat of the moment on this score had been worse than none; he regretted now that he had made it at all. He was forced to admit that, if guilty, the Malays had acted most illogically; so much so, indeed, that they seemed to be exonerated.

Well, then, there was Gulab Singh. Gulab Singh hadn't suggested that any search of the kit bag should be made, and presumably had had no reason to expect that any search of it *would* be made; and Gulab Singh could undoubtedly have found an opportunity of slipping the book into the bag. But why? Kenneth Wayne shook his head. Why? There must be reasonable motive for an act. Granting the value of the book to be such that a man would commit murder for it, the man wasn't likely to take any chance of losing it once it was in his possession if he could help it. To hide it temporarily—yes. But securely! Gulab Singh had had no guarantee that he, Kenneth Wayne, would not, for instance, have wanted something in the kit bag at almost any moment on the way back in the boat, and the book would then naturally have been found and Gulab Singh's work would have been in vain. It was childish to imagine that Gulab Singh counted on getting the book back to Salabam in this fashion, and then on getting it out of the bag before the latter was unpacked and when he, Kenneth Wayne, wasn't looking! It wouldn't hold water.

There remained, then, one other theory, or possibility—quite at variance in motive with the other two: That the murder had not primarily been committed in order to obtain the book; and that the book had been used merely to throw the onus of the crime on some one else's shoulders—and that he, Kenneth Wayne, had been selected as that "some one else." But this demanded as a premise that the *identity*, the priceless intrinsic value accredited to the book, was unknown to the murderer. And this in turn suggested a decidedly ugly corollary. It suggested the more than probability that, following this theory, the murderer was a *white man*, since, from all appearances, there was not a native in the whole region but knew all about the book.

Kenneth Wayne stood still in the middle of the room to mull over the different phases of this theory again. There were white men here quite capable of committing murder. There was Nicky Fouché, and there was Mr.

Walters from Manchester. Suspicion at least, in no way maligned their reputations! And the Cheruchuk River was quite accessible by land as well as by boat. It would be interesting to know how and where, separately or collectively, these two men had spent the last twenty-four hours. In fact, it might be very much worth while. The boat, thanks to the sullen behaviour of the Malays, had made a very slow return passage; whereas any one, leaving the old fanatic's hut during the night, and after the murder, either by land or water, could have been back in Salabam hours ahead of it.

So much for Nicky Fouché and Mr. Walters from Manchester! But, if this theory was to be followed to its logical conclusion, the Frenchman and the German were not the only white men upon whom suspicion, with at least some degree of justification, might rest. There was Glover. But in Glover's case it was, however, quite a different matter—there was no criminal “history,” as it were, to point the man out as one not only capable of such a crime, but as one who would not hesitate to commit it; it was, rather, the character of the man, coupled with a series of very strange and wholly unexplainable acts that in themselves invited, to put it mildly, a good deal of speculation. Glover, the beachcomber! The thought of Glover had cropped up in his mind a good many times during the past few hours. Who was Glover, anyway? The man was certainly up to some game—he had feigned altogether too much. Why had he slipped away from Gulab Singh the night before last? And where the devil had he gone that night? Glover hadn't been badly wounded—less so evidently from his subsequent actions than even he, Kenneth Wayne, who had never rated the injury as anything but slight at most, had originally believed. Glover, from a physical standpoint, could have been at the ruined village on the Cheruchuk River.

All very well! But if the book, the greed of it, had not been the incentive to the murder of the old fanatic, why should any one of the three, Fouché, or Walters, or Glover, have murdered the man? Why should any one of the three have been there at all? Why should——

He flung out his clenched hand in an angry, impotent gesture. He couldn't answer those questions. And on top of all that none of his theories explained still another point—the theft of the stores. Why had they been stolen? Why? His hand clenched again. No, he couldn't answer! He couldn't, standing here, reconstruct the crime, could he? If he could, he wouldn't be standing here!

Well, what was he to do?

It was not merely the fact of being charged with murder that troubled him so much, for somehow it seemed so absurd, so impossible in his own eyes, that he could not as yet accept that phase of the situation seriously. There was far more involved than all that. He had come to Salabam for a purpose—that was what mattered, what was vital, and on account of which it was so imperative that he should clear himself at any cost and in any way he could. Any way he could! Was there *any* way? He could kick down that door and run for it—Nicky Fouché, so far as he, Kenneth Wayne, could make out, had considered his duties as a jailor performed when he had removed all weapons and locked both door and window, for there had been no evidence of any special watch being put upon the room. Nicky Fouché evidently shared the opinion of Major Peters that, since a prisoner could not get away from the island in any case, the prisoner's common sense would lead him to choose an hotel room with the assurance of food rather than a hopeless existence in the woods where, even if he eluded immediate pursuit, he could live only as a hunted beast from day to day.

Kenneth Wayne was pacing the room again in quick, nervous strides. In God's name, what was he to do? Suppose he did break down the door and run for it? With every white man and every native hunting *him*, what chance had he to hunt—Crimson Sash? Also, to run for it would remove the last shade of doubt that might remain in any one's mind as to his guilt. That wasn't the way—the only way was to *clear* himself so that with untied hands he could carry on with his work again. But walking up and down this room in idleness, inactive, save that his brain was working itself into a frenzy, wasn't the way either.

He heard voices from around the corner on the front of the verandah. One was Dorothy Merwood's. He didn't know whose the other's was—probably one of the boarder's. He found himself listening eagerly—and strangely enough with no idea of attempting to discover the sense of what was said. It was Dorothy Merwood's voice. And then slowly a hard smile came to his lips. He had forgotten. She, too, had found the evidence against him conclusive of guilt. He had been a vain optimist to expect anything else. He didn't know why he had expected it—and yet somehow her attitude stabbed and hurt. He did not blame her—and yet—What did it mean? Had this quest upon which he had come brought something else into his life, something not antagonistic to the pledge he had made to Old Man Wayne, not a thing that would swerve him from his path, but something else of a far different tenor, something that stirred his pulse, bringing an intense yearning that evidenced itself now in an eagerness to catch the tones of a *voice*?

And that somehow brought the sense of ignominy suddenly and acutely into his present condition!

He swept a hand across his forehead. It came away wet with sweat beads. God, it was hot in here, insufferably hot—strange, he had not noticed the heat before! Well? He hadn't answered his own question! Was he afraid of it? Or wasn't he sure? Or would he beg it on the ground that any answer was useless—that if this something new *had* come into his life, it, like the pledge to Old Man Wayne, was a shattered, hopeless thing now? No! It wasn't shattered, it wasn't broken—nor was his pledge—not yet! He wasn't so easily beaten as that. And if that inquisitive inner consciousness of his demanded an answer so insistently it should have it. It was true. It had come unbidden, unsought. He did not know just where, or how, or whether it was but a moment gone that it had crystallised itself into the thing of glory that it now was, to be possessed and cherished, if God so willed it, as a sacred, holy gift—the gift of love.

The voices died away.

A footstep, quick, so light and almost soundless as to be stealthy, came along the verandah and halted outside the door. A key that seemed to fumble most curiously for a moment or so finally turned in the lock. And then the door of Kenneth Wayne's room opened and closed again cautiously.

Still standing motionless, as he had stood watching and listening, Kenneth Wayne stared now at a tall figure in white that, in the darkness, looked almost ghostlike—like a ghost with an enormous beehive balanced upon its head.

“Gulab Singh!” he ejaculated.

“Yes,” Gulab Singh answered; “but speak low, sahib, for the walls have many ears. Whisper even as I do, sahib.”

Kenneth Wayne nodded.

“Right!” he said; then quickly: “But what brings you here, Gulab Singh? And where did you get the key to that door?”

“Sahib,” said Gulab Singh, “there are many rooms in the hotel that are empty, but each has a lock. But they are cheap locks, sahib, and the key to one door fits many others. Sahib, I took four in number of these keys, and the second one opened the sahib's door.”

“Yes, I see,” said Kenneth Wayne. “I heard you fumbling with the lock. And now what? You have not answered my other question.”

“I came to open the sahib’s door,” said Gulab Singh simply, “and to bring him the key.”

“Good Lord!” exclaimed Kenneth Wayne. “You mean you’ve come to let me escape?”

The great turban seemed to flutter like some weird, detached thing in the darkness as Gulab Singh bowed low his head.

“It is even so, sahib,” he said. “It is not well that the sahib should be here, for I know that the sahib has not done this thing that they say he has. Sahib, I know of a certainty that it is not so.”

“Well, you seem to be the only one of that opinion, then,” said Kenneth Wayne a little bitterly; “and, upon my soul, I thank you for it, Gulab Singh. I suppose what you mean is that you don’t believe it.”

“No, sahib. Belief is one thing; knowledge is another. I know that it was not the sahib.”

“The devil, you say!” Kenneth Wayne flung out. “You know who did it, then?”

“No, sahib,” Gulab Singh answered. “That I do not know. I know only that it could not have been the sahib.”

“But how, then, do you know that?” demanded Kenneth Wayne tersely.

“Because, sahib,” Gulab Singh replied, “I slept that night, as it was well for me to do, at the door of the sahib’s tent, and no man could have entered, and the sahib could not have left the tent that night without my knowledge.”

“And yet,” said Kenneth Wayne, after a moment’s thought, “all the stores were taken from the camp without your knowledge. Why could I not have stepped out of the tent without awaking you?”

“Between a yard and a full two hundred paces from a sleeper’s ear, sahib, there is a great difference,” said Gulab Singh. “As the sahib knows, the stores were across the beach near the boat.”

“Yes; that is so,” agreed Kenneth Wayne; and then, with a sudden frown: “Why didn’t you say all this on the verandah this afternoon?”

“Sahib,” Gulab Singh answered gravely, “it was in my mind to do so, and it may be that in the holding of my tongue I have brought evil upon the sahib where I would bring only good; but, sahib, I do not think that it is so. Sahib, the Major Sahib was very angry and very sure because of the finding of the book, and it came to me that, even if I spoke, the Major Sahib would

still do to the sahib what has been done, because it did not explain how the *Kitab* came into the bag. Also, the Major Sahib was not a judge who sat in the courts and could say that the sahib was guilty, and that his life should pay forfeit, and so bring the end at once upon the sahib. Thus, sahib, my thoughts ran. But the Major Sahib spoke truly when he said that even if the sahib escaped from this room here it would be worse for him because of the white men and of the natives. Alone, the sahib could do nothing. But if the door were opened, and there was one to help and to find shelter and to bring the sahib food, then all might go well. But the one who helped must not be watched, or thought of him enter men's minds, because then he would be of no avail to the sahib. And so, sahib, I did not speak, for it was in my mind to open the sahib's door to-night, and the fear was upon me that if I spoke for the sahib this afternoon men would say to-night when the sahib had gone that it could be no one but Gulab Singh who would befriend him, and I, Gulab Singh, would be watched, and I could not then bring the sahib food without delivering him again into their hands. Will the sahib say that I have done ill?"

"No, by Jove; certainly not from your standpoint, at any rate!" said Kenneth Wayne promptly. "You took it for granted, of course, that, given the opportunity, I would get out of here?"

"Yes, sahib, to-night. The way is clear now. The Sahib Fouché has gone out. Let the sahib say what things he will take with him, and I will carry them. And if so be, sahib, it is written that this thing shall come at last before the judges and the sahib shall stand before the judges to answer, then will I bear testimony for the sahib of that which I know."

Kenneth Wayne reached out his hand and laid it on Gulab Singh's shoulder.

"That's mighty decent of you, Gulab Singh," he said; "but there's a point about that evidence of yours that may not have occurred to you. I am inclined to agree with you that I would be here just the same whether you had spoken this afternoon or not; and, that being so, isn't it rather probable that when it came to a court of law your testimony would be more likely to do you harm than to do me any good? I know it to be true because I did not leave my tent; but the more impossible it would appear to be for me to have gone out of the tent without your knowledge, the less likely they are to believe you—for it is an irrefutable fact that the book was in my bag. They are more likely to believe that you are either an accomplice or are perjuring yourself in an effort to save me. And in that case, Gulab Singh, it would go very ill with you indeed."

There was a long silence, and then Gulab Singh's grave voice came out of the darkness:

"What is written, sahib, is written. And if it should be even as the sahib says, then I would still journey to the place of the judges and bear witness. Does the sahib think that Gulab Singh would do less than that?"

"No—my word, I don't!" said Kenneth Wayne heartily. "And I thank you, Gulab Singh. But we will see! We cannot tell what is best to do until the time comes."

"May it never come for the sahib's sake!" said Gulab Singh earnestly. "And now will the sahib not say what I am to carry so that we may go?"

Again Kenneth Wayne laid his hand on the other's shoulder. He shook his head.

"Go where, Gulab Singh?" he asked quietly. "To be the chase of men? To be hunted in the woods from one end of the island to the other? And even if that were not so, how can I run from this thing? It is bad enough as it is, without men saying that I ran from it because I was guilty and afraid."

"Sahib," Gulab Singh answered, "my people will help and the sahib would not be found, and there would come a time when we could get the sahib to another island, and after that to still another until the sahib was far away and could go where he would. All that, sahib, could be done. And that they should say because of it that the sahib is guilty is no more than is said now. It is in my mind, sahib, that it is better to be an innocent man who is free, than an innocent man who has a rope tied around his neck and is hanged like a dog."

Run for it? Kenneth Wayne had already debated that idea in his mind—debated it, though, as one who subconsciously knew from the beginning what his decision would be. Well, what was that decision? Here was a chance beyond anything he could have hoped for, and there was truth in what Gulab Singh said. His shoulders squared back. Run? He had never run from anything, or any man in his life. Run for it? It would be the surrender of everything decent in him to a craven, panicky impulse to save his skin—a grovelling thing to do. And suddenly he laughed out shortly. On this count Old Man Wayne would not hold him to his pledge. There was something that came before that after all. And Old Man Wayne himself, thank God, typified that sort of thing!

There was only one answer.

“No, Gulab Singh,” he said steadily, “I cannot go. I shall not forget what you have done; but what I have just said is final. And because it is final it is my wish that we talk no more about it. I owe you more for this than I can pay, Gulab Singh; but I cannot go.”

It was very dark in the room, and for a time very silent. Then the turban seemed to waver again grotesquely in the blackness, and Kenneth Wayne felt his hand lifted and pressed against the other’s forehead.

“Grief is in my heart, sahib, and the fear of great evil,” said Gulab Singh. “But when the sahib speaks like that I know it is his will. I go, sahib.”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne.

In the darkness Gulab Singh moved over to the door. And once more for an instant there was a fumbling at the lock, and then Gulab Singh spoke again.

“Sahib,” he said, “in Salabam to-night there is much talk, and in the Malay houses there is no quiet. And the talk is not all good to hear. And the news of the finding of the *Kitab* of Kana-ee-a has spread as though it were told by a great voice on the mountain-top of the world that reached to the ears of all people. And men have come from the ends of the island already. And I cannot read the end of it, for all men desire the book. Also, there is anger against the sahib. All this, sahib, is to be remembered. And so, see, sahib, I have left the key in the door, and when I have gone the sahib will lock the door again and take out the key, and it will not be known that the door has been unlocked, and the sahib will have the key—for what may come to pass and what need the sahib may be in, who can tell? Is it well, sahib?”

“It is well, Gulab Singh,” Kenneth Wayne answered.

For a moment Gulab Singh stood listening at the door. Then a whispered, “Good-night, sahib,” floated back into the room, and Gulab Singh was gone.

Mechanically Kenneth Wayne walked over to the door, turned the key in the lock, and put the key in his pocket. After that for a long time he did not move. Then he took the key out of his pocket again, and weighed it tentatively in his hand.

This was an entirely different thing from running away, this idea that was formulating itself in his brain! Here was an opportunity to go and come with almost a guarantee of several hours of uninterrupted freedom—and those hours were worth the risk that Nicky Fouché might pay a turnkey’s

visit in the meantime, weren't they? Anything was better than inaction. If he could steal in on the outskirts of the Malay quarters, for instance—and listen! And there was always the chance of a lucky break that might set him on the track of Glover perhaps, on Mr. Walters from Manchester, or even—he smiled grimly—Nicky Fouché himself!

Well, why not? There was, after all, nothing to lose. He wasn't running away, or attempting to escape. In an hour, or two, or three, he would come back. If his absence was discovered, they would not have to hunt for him. He would know of it by the uproar that would be raised, and he would return that much sooner—that was all. They could make what they chose out of that. He stood square with himself on that score—that was what mattered most. It all resolved itself into a question of luck—luck that for a few hours his absence would not be noticed; luck that during those few hours he might accomplish something in his own behalf, something that by sitting here inside these four walls it was certain he never could do.

Yes, he would go!

He opened the door noiselessly—an inch at a time. The moon was hardly up yet, and the verandah was all shadows; but here at the side it seemed deserted, though from around the corner in front low voices in conversation and the occasional clink of a glass reached him. An instant more he stood listening, watching—then the door closed behind him as silently as it had opened, and Kenneth Wayne stepped out on the verandah.

—XIV—

A PRISONER AT LARGE

HUGGED close against the wall where the shadows were blackest, Kenneth Wayne began to make his way cautiously along the verandah with the lower end of it at the rear as his objective. The principal risks of discovery lay, of course, in some one coming around the corner of the verandah from the front, or appearing suddenly ahead of him from the stairway door that opened on the verandah; in either of which cases there was no shelter except the very untrustworthy one afforded by the shadows. There were two rooms to pass before he could get by the stairway door; but the nearer of the two was, he knew, unoccupied, which gave him no concern, and the other, though it belonged to Mr. Walters from Manchester, showed no light through its window blind, and should not, therefore, give him any concern either. Beyond the stairway door, if he remembered correctly, there were no more rooms, and once at the rear end of the verandah any one of the supporting posts would furnish an easy mode of access to the ground.

He passed the first door, treading on tiptoe, reached the second one—and paused involuntarily. There wasn't any light in the room, but the Englishman from Manchester was evidently there none the less. He could hear the sound of movement from within, very faintly it was true, almost indeed as though it were intentionally secretive, but it was nevertheless distinguishable. Mr. Walters could hardly be going to bed, or be in bed, at this hour—it couldn't be more than half-past eight. Rather curious that the man should elect to be in there in the dark, and——

Kenneth Wayne glanced swiftly around him. The sound of movement from within was *approaching* the door itself. There was no protection anywhere other than the shadows—except the stairway door, which, just a few yards away, he could see was open. He sprang quickly, silently toward it. It was the one chance—even if he were forced to the risk of going downstairs in case the other should come here too. But perhaps, anyway, he was displaying exaggerated caution; perhaps there had been no intention of opening that door just because the sounds from within had approached it. He

glanced sharply back over his shoulder as he reached the stairway entrance. No; there wasn't any mistake! He saw a dark form step from the threshold of Mr. Walters' room to the verandah.

Without a sound Kenneth Wayne slipped through the stairway door, and for an instant hesitated at the head of the stairs, weighing his chances. Then suddenly he drew his body into the angle of the wall at the far corner of the landing, and stood still, smiling in grim satisfaction. The landing, due to the right-angled turn necessary to an exit to the verandah, was generously wide, and it was intensely dark here—dark enough! Thanks to the enclosed staircase and the very commendable economy in the absence of lamps on the part of Monsieur Nicholas Fouché, he could scarcely see his hand before his eyes. He was fairly sure that Mr. Walters of Manchester had not seen him, and, that being the case, the man, even if he turned in here to go downstairs, would almost certainly not see him now. This would do excellently! He could have continued on down the stairs himself, of course; but that was precisely what he did not want to do. There was far too much risk of being discovered there on the ground floor before he could get out of the hotel—likely to be some one coming or going from the bar, for instance. A verandah post at the rear was infinitely the better and safer way.

Queer! What had become of the man? There was no sound of footsteps either going toward the front of the verandah, or coming this way. The man must have stepped back into his room for some reason. There didn't seem to be any other——

Kenneth Wayne felt his muscles grow suddenly rigid; mechanically he found himself attempting to squeeze his body deeper into the angle of the wall. The oblong of the door opening on the verandah, less opaque with the filmy murk of the night-light behind it, blurred with a shadowy form that made no sound. The fraction of a second passed as Kenneth Wayne watched; and then, still without sound, the shadow came through the doorway—and halted at the head of the stairs. And now an interminable time seemed to pass, and the man still stood there—stood there until, to Kenneth Wayne's ears, his own breathing sounded hideously loud and stertorous. Why didn't the man go on down the stairs? What was he waiting for? He appeared, from a slight rustling sound which he made now, to be fumbling for something.

A match!

With a sharp crackle it burst into flame. The man held it between his cupped hands, facing the stairs, and lighted a cigarette. He did not turn his

head; he puffed with slow deliberation. The match went out. And then suddenly out of the darkness there came a low, drawling voice.

“Out for a bit of an airing, old top, I take it,” observed the man casually.

Kenneth Wayne straightened up with a jerk—but he made no answer. The shock of discovery, the cool insouciance of the other held him, as it were, tongue-tied; but there was more than that to hold him silent, tight-lipped, staring at the glowing tip of the cigarette. It wasn’t Mr. Walters from Manchester who had come out of Mr. Walters’ room—this wasn’t Walters! The face he had seen in the flame of the match was the face of Glover, the beachcomber!

“Saw me come out of that room, eh?” Glover drawled again. “I thought you did. Thought, though, you might keep a secret if some one kept one of yours—what? Well, I’ll be getting along. Good-night, Mr. Wayne!”

Kenneth Wayne was himself in an instant. He stepped sharply forward. Quite apart from this new incident, which alone was more than ever suspicious in itself, Glover was one of those with whose movements in the last twenty-four hours he was keenly concerned. He hadn’t expected this—to be discovered himself. But since that was now an accomplished fact, he meant to have it out with this man here and now.

“Wait a minute!” he said curtly. “There’s a little more than that to be said on the subject of secrets. Queer things have been going on around here, and some of them seem to be pretty well centred in you. There are some questions to which I want an answer.”

“Look here,” said Glover confidentially, “it’s going to be a wonderful night—wonderful! Soft airs and all that—and a glorious moon. Just the night for a walk. Miss Merwood’s just started off all alone for a visit to Mrs. Keene, the missionary’s wife.”

Kenneth Wayne bit his lips as he stared at the other.

“Facetiousness won’t get you anywhere!” he snapped. “And in any case, leave Miss Merwood’s name out of this! I want to know, to begin with, why you gave Gulab Singh the slip the night before last, where you went, and _____”

“Listen!” said Glover in the same confidential tone. “Nicky Fouché isn’t anywhere around, and about all of the native boys of the hotel here have sneaked off to join in the excitement with their brothers and sisters over that unique little volume you carted back here from the Cheruchuk River—you

couldn't have chosen a better time for your airing. It would be too bad to wait until the luck turned!"

Kenneth Wayne's anger was rising.

"That's my affair!" he said evenly. "And this sort of thing won't go! I want a straight answer to my questions."

"Lord!" expostulated Glover heavily. "I've given you a lot of information already—and very valuable information too, I'd say. And if I were in your shoes I know what I'd do with it."

"You mean," Kenneth Wayne flung out sharply, "that you refuse to answer me?"

"That's it, old top!" The drawl was still in Glover's voice, but there was something else in it too now—a sort of cold finality. "You've got it—exactly. What you know about me to-night, and what I know about you to-night makes it what you might call an even break. You mind your business—and I mind mine. Couldn't be anything fairer than that, could there?"

Kenneth Wayne choked back a hot retort.

"You are evidently labouring under the impression that I am trying to run away," he said, steadying his voice. "I'm not. It was in the hope of an opportunity more or less like this, though not necessarily with you, the chance of picking up a clue of some sort that would help me to the bottom of this mess rather than sit in there and do nothing, that brought me out. In an hour, or so, I shall go back."

"Really," said Glover softly, "I haven't the slightest doubt of it—not the slightest! But *I* haven't asked any questions, have I? Now this afternoon I'm afraid I didn't help matters along any, but I thought you'd understand in a kind of friendly way that I hadn't forgotten the night before last—what? And it's none of my business—but don't you think it's a little *dangerous* for you to stand talking around here?"

"I've told you," said Kenneth Wayne brusquely, "that I am going——"

"Yes," said Glover with a chuckle. "And so am I. Right now."

Kenneth Wayne's hand shot out and fastened with a grip like steel on the other's arm.

"That won't do any good," said Glover coolly. "Suppose we're fools enough to mix it up in a rough and tumble, and roll down the stairs in each other's arms! Whoever heard the racket and came to pick us up would be

almost *certain* to think you were trying to escape, instead of just being out for—er—a short constitutional. And the result would be that, even if you said I had been in Walters' room, you would have to go back to yours at once without having even been out of the hotel, and they *might* be unpleasant enough to tie you up this time. That would be rotten luck, wouldn't it?"

Kenneth Wayne's hand fell away from the other's arm. It was quite true. Glover, of course, did not believe him—who would? Also, it was quite certain that if Glover would not talk, and it was obvious enough that Glover wouldn't, he, Kenneth Wayne, was in no position to make the other do so. He felt suddenly childish—that his whole escapade was childish. Glover was up to some game, of course; but he couldn't follow Glover like some fiction detective with a pair of gum-shoes—even if he had had the gum-shoes. With a short laugh, he turned abruptly away—but at the doorway to the verandah he paused again, as Glover's voice came in a whisper from the head of the stairs.

"Rum go, that book! Whole island's a bally insane asylum. There isn't a native will sleep for a week. Take a tip from me, old bucko, and look out where you go!"

Glover's footsteps receded down the stairs and died away.

Kenneth Wayne stepped out on the verandah and made his way along to the rear; and here, selecting one of the posts, he slid down to the ground. He did this in a wholly mechanical way, and because, as it were, that was what he had set out to do and he might as well carry on. But he found himself apathetic and listless about it—robbed of incentive. His meeting with Glover had put a damper on his enthusiasm—had brought him a sense of futility. The start had not been propitious; and that wholly apart from the fact that one man already knew he had left his room, for he was not at all afraid that Glover would say anything. Quite aside from the fact that Glover appeared to be not unmindful of that other night, Glover had obviously some axe of his own to grind; and Glover, far from being swayed by any sense of moral obligation to the law that would cause him to make an effort to frustrate what he undoubtedly believed to be an attempt at escape, was apparently only too anxious that a mutual silence should be observed.

There were no lights of any kind here at the back of the hotel. But there was Glover's moon now just coming up over the trees behind some kind of a storehouse, or out-building belonging to the hotel, a hundred yards or so farther in the rear. He stared about him. His thoughts and, yes, too, his

emotions, seemed to run together now in a jumble. The night was very quiet, even if the natives all over the lot were keyed up with excitement. He couldn't hear anything; not even the voices of pedestrians from the road in front—if there were any. Damn that infernal sense of futility that kept sneaking insidiously upon him! He wasn't without purpose, or an objective either. Certainly, he need not be idle. The natives, for instance, knew a lot—and they must be talking amongst themselves to-night. There was something more about Glover that kept bothering him. What the devil was it? Oh, yes! Glover to-night, in both manner and conversation, had appeared to be *amazingly* sober!

He drew back suddenly under the over-hang of the verandah, and stood quite still now. What was that out there—or, rather, who was it? Over at the far corner of what might be called the back yard of the hotel was a little clump of palms, and, just emerging from these, he had caught sight of the figure of a man in white. He watched now, his interest more and more aroused. The figure, half-crouching, hurrying, something furtive in its movements, seemed to be making for the storehouse, or whatever the building was, out there in the clearer space. It might be a native, or it might even be Glover again, he could not tell; but, whoever it was, the man would have had to make a wide detour from the road in front to have reached his present position, instead of coming in an ordinary and direct way past the side of the hotel itself where there was a roadway for precisely that purpose. Why the detour—coupled with the stealth that the man was obviously exhibiting?

Too bad the moon wasn't higher! The figure was only a blur of white flitting along out there. And now it passed beyond the out-building and disappeared. Kenneth Wayne watched for its reappearance on the other side. Nothing. A minute went by. And then from the out-building itself it seemed as though, if his eyes were not playing him tricks, there were suddenly emanating from here and there along its length a number of tiny and almost indiscernible chinks of light.

Kenneth Wayne, with a sudden, twisted smile, stepped quietly out from under the verandah, and began to make his way noiselessly toward the out-building. Whatever the outcome of his stolen hours of freedom, and however valueless they might prove to be in results, they were obviously not to lack for interest. First Glover—and now this! There was something in the wind here beyond a doubt, something going on under cover—and anything that went on under cover to-night had a very decided claim on his attention.

He was treading softly now, working around toward the rear of the out-building. There wasn't any mystery about the chinks of light. The out-building, windowless, was in very bad repair, and in places the walls, as he could see now, actually gaped open. A lamp had obviously been lighted inside.

A voice reached him now from within. It was harsh, raised a little in anger, the foreign accent strongly marked. Kenneth Wayne recognised it at once as that of Nicky Fouché. He slipped around the rear corner of the building, and, edging along until he found one of the wider apertures in the warped boarding, applied his eye to the opening.

He was possessed of an almost unobstructed view. The place, obviously a storehouse, contained a number of packing cases, some of very large size. He was instantly conscious that there was something familiar about these cases—that, if not the same ones, they were, at least, very similar to those that he remembered now, though he had paid no attention to them at the time, he had seen slung over the ship's side for lightering ashore on the afternoon of his arrival here. The cover of one of the cases had been removed, and on the floor beside it were scattered fifteen or twenty bolts of cloth, and upon this pile there sprawled the form of Mr. Walters, the cloth merchant from Manchester. At Mr. Walters' elbow was a partially emptied gin bottle; while over Mr. Walters' prostrate form stood Monsieur Nicholas Fouché with a lighted lamp in his hand.

Kenneth Wayne smiled in a hard-faced way as he stared within. Quite an intriguing little scene! And from all appearances Mr. Walters' cloth business was conducted on not at all an insignificant scale!

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché was speaking.

“*Sacré mille cochons!*” swore Monsieur Fouché with a snarl in his voice. “Are you crazy, that you get drunk to-night? To-night—*mon Dieu!*” He bent down and shook Mr. Walters from Manchester roughly. “Heh? Are you crazy, I say?”

Mr. Walters, after a moment or two, raised himself on his elbow, blinked at the light—and suddenly sat upright.

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché was dancing from toe to toe in his excitement.

“You’ve missed your calling, Frenchy!” said Mr. Walters with an ugly sneer. “You ought to have been a ballet master! And as for the rest, you mind your own business! I don’t get drunk! But”—he reached for the bottle

and took an enormous gulp—"I take a drink when I want one. Understand? But I don't get drunk!"

Nicky Fouché set the lamp down on top of one of the cases.

"Damn!" said he fervently. "You let that alone! I know you too well! You do not get drunk? *Mon Dieu!* Well, then, call it what you like! That you do not stagger around like most men and talk with a tongue that is too big for your mouth, is true; but you become worse than that, and at such times the devil himself is not uglier than you. A little fire burns in your brain—eh? Do I not know? You have the passions of hell, *mon ami*—and they run loose."

"Look out you don't get in their road, then!" said Mr. Walters with a vicious laugh, rising to his feet.

"Listen!" The Frenchman's voice became suddenly placating. "It is perhaps that I have said too much. But offence—no! We do not quarrel—we two. And perhaps it will not make so much difference after all to-night. I think it was the bad luck that set my tongue going, and——"

Mr. Walters from Manchester, his puffy eyes narrowed, took an abrupt step forward.

"What do you mean—bad luck?" he growled.

"That to-night the plans are no longer safe," said Nicky Fouché in a sort of tense and quavering earnestness. "They are dangerous. That we cannot go on."

"Glover—eh!" exclaimed Mr. Walters with a savage oath. "The swine! That's it, eh? He's tumbled even to what's going on to-night, has he?"

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché shook his head.

"That I do not know. I do not worry about Glover to-night. If he knew the plan, it would be his game to wait until it was over and then demand a share."

"Right! So he would!" Mr. Walters' lips curled maliciously. "And he'd get it, too! And this time there wouldn't be any blooming error about his getting *all* that was coming to him, either! That suits me! Well, what's the trouble then, if it's not Glover?"

"That book!" Monsieur Nicholas Fouché was speaking quickly, excitedly again. "The book that Wayne had hidden in his bag. Clever—what you call smooth, eh?—that fellow Wayne!"

“No!” grunted Mr. Walters from Manchester contemptuously. “He is a fool. If he’d kept his mouth shut in the first place, and not tried to be so *clever* in slipping it over on the natives, he’d have got away with it; or, at least, he’d have got a chance to get it out of his bag before it was seen.” Mr. Walters reached suddenly for the bottle and took another generous gulp. “I wish I’d had his luck to cop it! If that old pirate bird only had a little of what they say he had, that book would be worth”—he slapped one of the cases heavily with the palm of his hand—“ten years of this sort of thing.”

“More than that, *mon ami*!” Monsieur Nicholas Fouché’s voice seemed suddenly to take on a hungry tone. “We would be rich—rich! It is not fable—it is history. The old pirate sank many ships—very many of them. Ah, you make me dream! Wealth—luxury—a lifetime of it—and all between the covers of one little book, eh? But”—he sucked in his breath in a long-drawn sigh—“we have not got the book—and it is gone again!”

“I’m not so sure about that!” said Mr. Walters, with a low, unpleasant laugh.

A queer little breathless sound came from Monsieur Nicholas Fouché.

“What did you say, *mon ami*—what did you say?”

“Bah!” sneered Mr. Walters from Manchester. “You heard what I said! Now see if you can hear this too! What would you do to get the book, little Frenchy?”

Kenneth Wayne could not catch the reply—he was merely conscious of a low, prolonged, passionate murmur. Then Mr. Walters from Manchester laughed coarsely.

“I thought so!” said Mr. Walters from Manchester. “Well, it should not be so difficult, then. I have cracked harder nuts myself. But there is something else first. What has the book got to do with what you were saying about not moving this stuff here to-night?”

“It’s the natives,” said Nicky Fouché—and launched suddenly into an excited flood of profanity in his mother tongue. “That is what kept me for the last hour. You see! I began to be suspicious when I saw, not once, but twice, some of my boys whispering together in the corners. Then, instead of coming out here to join you at once, I thought I would see—how do you call it?—what was blowing in the wind. Yes? You understand? *’Cré nom d’un nom*, it was well I did! For an hour I have been everywhere amongst the natives. And everywhere it is The Locked Book—the *Konchi-kan Kitab* of Kana-ee-a. They are excited. They talk. They whisper. They gather together.

They go from hut to hut. There is a restlessness upon them like a disease. There is not one that will sleep to-night. Talamori and his men could move nothing down to the proas. It is impossible. They would be seen."

Mr. Walters' countenance darkened with obvious anger and chagrin; and in turn he blasphemed with fervency.

"You agree then," said Monsieur Nicholas Fouché, "that we must attempt nothing to-night?"

"Agree!" Mr. Walters flung back in an ugly tone. "If what you say is true, even a fool would know we'd got to sit tight. Talamori'll have to get back to the Cheruchuk again for cover for a night or two. D'you suppose he's here yet?"

"How should I know?" Nicky Fouché answered a little helplessly. "Since he was only to leave the Cheruchuk so as to get the proas into the cove behind the headland when it was dark! There was no time arranged. That would be impossible—eh? He may be here any minute—or maybe not for hours. I would have gone down there instead of coming here only—you can see, eh, *tonnerre!*—I might have missed him, and he would come here, and you would know nothing and would start to load the men, and we would be caught."

"Great intelligence, Frenchy!" applauded Mr. Walters from Manchester, with an ill-tempered grin. "Well, we've got to head him off now, haven't we?"

"Yes," said Monsieur Nicholas Fouché quickly, "and one of us must go to the cove, and the other must stay here in case Talamori is already on his way. Whoever goes must take the road, though *naturellement* Talamori will come by the woods; but for you or me to go that way would take too much time and there would be too much chance of missing him, and nothing would be gained, and"—with a sudden grimace, as Mr. Walters reached again for the gin bottle and tilted it to his lips—"I think—it is an idea, *mon ami*—it will be better for me to go to the cove."

"Oh, you do—do you!" There was a snarl in Mr. Walters' voice. He glared for a moment at the other; then he laughed raspily. "Well, I've been thinking about that, too—and I think you won't! Seeing there isn't going to be anything pulled to-night, I'll take you far enough into my confidence to let you know that a walk down the road in that particular direction has got a special attraction for me. You'll stay here, Frenchy!"

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché shrugged his shoulders.

“We will not quarrel about that,” he murmured, “but”—with a quick, furtive glance at the other—“but what is this special attraction?”

“My business!” said Mr. Walters from Manchester with a leer.

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché appeared to be suddenly both excited and ill at ease. He fingered nervously at his goatee.

“*Mon Dieu!*” he whispered anxiously. “Is it that? I am afraid for what you might do when you are like this. Major Peters lives on the way to the cove.”

“So do a lot of other people,” snapped Mr. Walters from Manchester. “Don’t you worry about what I’m going to do. All you’ve got to know is that”—he held up the gin bottle, then slipped it into his pocket—“I’m taking this along to call Talamori’s bluff on how good a Mohammedan he is! Savvy?”

Mr. Walters walked with no sign of unsteadiness to the rear door of the storehouse.

“But,” cried out Monsieur Nicholas Fouché, “I—*sacré nom!*—I——”

“Shut your face!” shouted Mr. Walters from Manchester with a rush of temper. “Understand? I do what I please!”

He opened the door and looked out. The moon, higher above the trees now, was flooding the clearing. Mr. Walters from Manchester stepped outside and shut the door behind him.

There was no one in sight.

—XV—

MOONLIGHT AND MATCH-FLAME

THE native huts, singly and in groups, strung out until they overlapped what might be called the limits of the town, lay in amongst the trees behind the houses of the whites, which latter bordered the road. To reach the “cove” behind the headland by making a circuit around the Malay quarters would necessitate too wide a detour; and, besides, the going would be very difficult. It would take much too long.

Kenneth Wayne lay flat on his stomach a few feet back from the roadside. A hundred yards away to his right were the lights of the hotel. Figures passed up and down on the road—for the most part Malays. Sometimes they halted in little groups whispering together.

The road, too, was obviously impracticable.

There was one other way—the beach. It was deserted, and, though bright now with moonlight, the line of trees that fringed the road would serve quite admirably as a screen to protect one from observation. Besides, even if noticed, a figure walking on the beach would be nothing out of the ordinary, nothing to attract or arouse particular attention—provided the figure were not *recognised*. Kenneth Wayne nodded to himself. From a distance that was hardly likely to happen.

He stirred impatiently. He had been lying here fully ten minutes now waiting for an opportunity to steal across the road. Neither Glover nor Nicky Fouché had exaggerated the natives’ restlessness. If they were humming around in their own quarters, they were also abroad in force—or else they were possessed by some infernal fascination to mass and congregate upon this particular section of the road!

Kenneth Wayne stood up suddenly. For the first time there was no one in his immediate vicinity upon the road. He crossed it quickly, and darted in behind the shelter of the line of trees on the other side.

The long sweep of beach lay ahead of him—a mile of it, at least, to the end of the bay—deserted, empty, white in the moonlight. With the protecting screen of trees between himself and the road now, he hurried forward.

Where the trees were thick together he ran at top speed; where they thinned and the road came into view he went more cautiously, even strolling nonchalantly at times, that a hurrying figure might not, if seen, invite comment or investigation.

The location of the cove did not trouble him. It was behind a headland, and, from the conversation between Nicky Fouché and Mr. Walters from Manchester, Major Peters' house had to be passed in order to reach it. Therefore its direction was fixed. For the rest, it was merely a question of following the shoreline until it was reached.

Who was this Talamori who had been hiding in the Cheruchuk River? The question thudded at Kenneth Wayne's brain as he ran, and walked, and ran again in turn. He was down past Major Peters' house now. Who was this man who waited for darkness to come with his proas? A wild thought flashed upon him. No; not that! Hardly that! Luck was perhaps breaking for him—but hardly to that extent. He found himself laughing harshly under his breath. He did not expect to find that the man was Crimson Sash, did he?

He answered himself savagely: No; he did not! His interest in the man consisted in the fact that, as late as this afternoon at any rate, the other had been hiding in the Cheruchuk River. And on that score alone this Talamori at once assumed a position of very considerable importance in his mind.

He frowned now as he ran. Queer game, this, that was being played here! What was there in common between Nicky Fouché and Mr. Walters on the one hand, and this Talamori with his proas, whoever he might be, on the other? Why were Nicky Fouché and Mr. Walters so anxious that a string of this Talamori's followers, presumably, should not be seen carrying bolts of cloth?—since Mr. Walters from Manchester was in the cloth business! Where did Glover fit into this?

Kenneth Wayne halted suddenly, and shrugged his shoulders. These things were apart, not of his immediate concern. They had nothing to do with the murder of the old fanatic that had been laid at his door—the only connection they had with the dragon-covered book was that this Talamori had been hiding in the Cheruchuk River. But Talamori wasn't a white man, was he? And if a native, Talamori would have known all about the book—and would have kept it for himself. That was his, Kenneth Wayne's, own argument, wasn't it? Well, then? What was the answer? Was this trail he was following now only another one that led up against a blind wall? Neither Nicky Fouché nor Mr. Walters from Manchester, from what he had overheard back there, appeared to have had any hand in the crime.

He swept a clenched hand across a heated brow. His lips tightened doggedly. That wasn't why he had halted and stood hesitating now—just because his thoughts had run riot a little. He was going through with this anyway. The question was whether he dared risk taking the open road itself now? He was now beyond the end of the town in this direction. A little way back on the road he could see the lights of the last house, which stood quite alone, like a farflung outpost from its fellows. Ahead, the short section of the road that was in view was apparently quite deserted. On the seaward side a thickly wooded headland ran out to close the bay. The cove, obviously, was still farther on. Would he better take the road, or keep on as he had been going and cut across the headland?

There was always the chance, perhaps more than a chance to-night with disquiet prevailing everywhere, of stray parties of natives cropping up unexpectedly on the road; and, besides, there was still Mr. Walters of Manchester to consider. Mr. Walters had taken the road; but Mr. Walters would not have *run* at any stage of his errand, and, even with the other's initial start, it was a question whether the man was now ahead, or close at hand. There was a bend in the road here, and, though the moonlight lay soft and clear upon it, Kenneth Wayne could not see far in either direction.

Why take any chance? The woods on the headland could not be very thick—and even if they were, it was certainly the safer way.

His decision made, he entered the tract of wooded growth, and began to cut across the point or headland. It was not so bad after all. He made good progress—not so good as though he had come by the road, of course, but better than he had expected.

Nor was it as far as he had expected—for after some five minutes of steady going he suddenly stood still. A voice, ahead of him through the trees, but out a little in the direction of the seaward end of the point, was calling in a low, guarded way. He listened. The voice became impatient in tone—much louder. He caught the words now:

“Hey, there! I say, you, out there! Damn it, what's the matter with you? Want 'em to hear me in Salabam?”

It was the voice of Mr. Walters from Manchester!

Kenneth Wayne, picking his way softly, turned in the direction of the voice. And then a few yards farther on he found himself suddenly at the edge of the wooded stretch—and once more stood still. He had been lucky again! If he had come any other way than across the headland, he would

without question have missed both the cove and Mr. Walters. The cove, he could see now, was nothing more than a little indentation in the headland itself, and, being almost surrounded by trees, would certainly have been hidden to view from the road.

Back in a little amongst the trees and secure from observation, he stared now at the scene before him. A few yards away on a narrow, circular strip of sand stood Mr. Walters from Manchester—and out a short distance from this strip of sand, as though they had grounded in shallow water, bulked the shapes of three proas. Mr. Walters had ceased to call; he was engaged now in extracting from his pocket the bottle with which he had armed himself before leaving the storehouse. There was no sign of life from any of the proas.

And now Mr. Walters from Manchester raised the bottle to his lips, drank—and apostrophised the moonlight.

“What d’you know about that!” exclaimed Mr. Walters heavily. “Gone! On their way up there already! Devil of a hurry about it—eh?—what?”

Mr. Walters from Manchester drank again—then held the bottle up to the moonlight and laughed raucously.

“And so’s that—gone!” said Mr. Walters. He flung the bottle out into the water. “Well, it’s all right! Frenchy’ll look after them. Can’t say I’m sorry—saves the waste of time standing palavering around here. Nothing like having two irons in the fire, and other fish to fry! What?” He laughed raucously again. “Well, I guess I’ll go fry ’em!” he said—and turning abruptly, disappeared through the trees in the direction of the road.

Kenneth Wayne passed his hand a little wearily across his eyes. His luck, after all, hadn’t amounted to much. He had had his struggle to get here for nothing—there was nothing to do but go back again. The man from the Cheruchuk River wasn’t here—he was, or would be, at the storehouse behind the hotel! Too bad he, Kenneth Wayne, hadn’t waited there—unless he was interested in that last remark of Mr. Walters from Manchester.

He shook his head, as he started back across the point. Mr. Walters, according to his own statement, might not be drunk; but Mr. Walters had consumed at least the major portion of a bottle of gin in the last few hours and could not help but be, unless he were a superman, somewhat fuddled of brain. This Talamori was the more interesting—and promising.

Kenneth Wayne emerged from the woods again close to the point where he had entered them—near the edge of the road. Mr. Walters, this time,

would, without any question, be ahead of him, thanks to the easier going on the road—but not very far ahead. He moved cautiously still nearer to the edge of the road, and peered out. He was not so much interested in Mr. Walters' movements, as he was in seeing that his own should not interest Mr. Walters! Yes, there was Mr. Walters, right enough—just passing around the bend beyond the house that stood alone here at this end of the town.

Kenneth Wayne nodded. So long as he kept Mr. Walters ahead of him it was all right. He went on again along the beach, skirting the fringe of trees at the roadside, passed the house that stood alone, and, reaching a point beyond the bend of the road, edged in through the trees again for a second reconnaissance. Here was another long straight stretch of vacant road before the houses began to nestle, as it were, more compactly together in the town proper. In the moonlight he could see the road stretching like a grey ribbon before him for a considerable distance—much farther, it was certain, than the distance that had previously intervened between himself and Mr. Walters. But Mr. Walters was no longer in sight. Kenneth Wayne rubbed his eyes and looked again. The road was empty and deserted—even the restless natives hadn't come down this far.

Perhaps Mr. Walters from Manchester had taken suddenly to the beach! Kenneth Wayne drew away from the roadside, and in turn searched the long, white reach of sand. Nothing here, either—as far as he could see! Strange! The man seemed to have vanished in a most amazing fashion.

Kenneth Wayne returned to the roadside—and again rubbed his eyes. This was some absurd now-you-see-me-and-now-you-don't sort of game, wasn't it? Mr. Walters was standing in the middle of the road not a hundred yards away, and was peering back in his, Kenneth Wayne's direction. And then Mr. Walters from Manchester disappeared again—but this time there was no mystery in the man's movements. Mr. Walters had simply drawn back behind a tree at the edge of the road.

Kenneth Wayne's lips tightened. Had the man discovered that he had been followed? It looked like it. And, worse still, Mr. Walters from Manchester now occupied a strategical position that he, Kenneth Wayne, did not like at all. He could neither go on along the beach nor along the road without being seen by Mr. Walters.

The man was a damned Jack-in-the-box! There he was out in the road again—and now he appeared to be sauntering leisurely back this way. A bit cool of the man, if he knew he had been followed! Kenneth Wayne smiled

grimly. He hadn't given the puffy-eyed representative of the cloth house in Manchester credit for that much nerve. Perhaps it was the gin that——

Kenneth Wayne crouched suddenly down behind a tree trunk. There was a light, quick step on the road almost in front of him. He had not heard it before; he had not been looking in the opposite direction—his attention had been concentrated on Mr. Walters from Manchester. A figure in white passed by . . . a trim, graceful, little figure . . . without any hat on . . . the hair that glinted gold in the sun turned now to bronze in the moonlight.

Dorothy Merwood!

Glover's words came back to mind in a flash. That must be the Keenes' house back there. And through Kenneth Wayne's brain too there flashed Mr. Walters' "special attraction in this particular direction," and Mr. Walters' "fish to fry." And he remembered, too, a look he had once seen in Mr. Walters' eyes.

Kenneth Wayne sprang to his feet, took a step forward—and stopped short, choking back a savage laugh. Mr. Walters might not be welcome, else he would have called for her at that house to accompany her back, but at least Dorothy Merwood wasn't in any danger—and he, Kenneth Wayne, was supposed to be a prisoner, confined and charged with murder. And perhaps more unwelcome still!

He saw Mr. Walters from Manchester hurrying forward now, saw Dorothy Merwood halt in evident surprise and hesitation—and then Kenneth Wayne's face hardened suddenly. They were scarcely twenty-five yards away. It was not merely a pantomime that he was witnessing—he could hear their voices, catch something of what was said. Her cool tones reached him now, as she drew back her arm from the man's attempt to slip it through his own.

"Thank you, Mr. Walters," she said; "but that is not at all necessary."

"Oh, I say!" protested Mr. Walters from Manchester ingratiatingly. "You don't mean that! Come along now, don't be stand-offish!"

The man was trying to take her arm again. Kenneth Wayne moved forward behind the shelter of the trees. He could not see so well now, and for a moment only a confused murmur of voices came to him. Then he heard Dorothy Merwood's voice again, still cool and contained, but with a ring of anxiety in it:

"Kindly let me pass, Mr. Walters. You're not yourself. I—I think you've been drinking."

“I don’t get drunk”—the man’s voice was suddenly raised in a surly tone—“and I don’t get thrown down either! Since that nigger-killing crook landed in here a few days ago you haven’t had eyes for any one else—though maybe you’ve got over that after this afternoon. You were sweet enough before he came—and I fancy you can be again.”

Kenneth Wayne was at a vantage point where he could see again. He was quite close to the two now.

“I think you’re mad!” Dorothy Merwood cried out.

“Don’t you be a little fool!” Mr. Walters’ tones were sullen and ugly. “Come on now, be chummy! Give me that pretty little arm of yours.”

Mr. Walters reached for the girl’s arm again, and this time imprisoned it; but in an instant Dorothy Merwood wrenched it loose, and, seemingly with all her strength, struck Mr. Walters from Manchester full across the face.

An oath purred from Mr. Walters’ lips.

“You’ll pay for that!” he snarled. “You’ll pay for it with your lips, my beauty! You’re the kind that’s got to be taught”—he had caught her up in his arms despite her struggles—“and I’ll teach you——”

A cry came from Dorothy Merwood.

It was a matter of yards—very few of them. Kenneth Wayne, a fury upon him that maddened his senses, his lips white with passion, flung himself forward. Six feet in height he stood, and he was a man of great strength. Before they saw him he was upon them. His hands snatched at Mr. Walters’ neck, closed around it, tightened, and tightened again until there came a strangling, choking sound—and then Mr. Walters from Manchester seemed to rise straight up from the ground, and the next instant went hurtling through the air and crashed upon his face in the middle of the road a good half dozen paces away.

“Get out of here!” said Kenneth Wayne hoarsely. “Get out—while you can!”

For a moment, fists clenched, he eyed the other; and then, suddenly become hesitant in his actions, he turned his back upon the man and faced Dorothy Merwood. Her hands held tightly to her breast, her breath coming in short, panting little gasps, she was staring at him wide-eyed, startled, amazed.

“You—*here?*” she said, and relief, anxiety, a troubled wonder, all seemed mingled in her tones. “I——” And then her voice rose in a quick,

wild cry. "Look out!" she screamed. "Oh, look out! He——"

Kenneth Wayne whirled around. Mr. Walters from Manchester was still lying in the road, but he had raised himself on one elbow now, and with his other hand was tugging at the pocket of his coat. He was laughing like a man bereft of reason.

"Legal, by God, legal to shoot an escaped prisoner—eh!" he laughed.

But the laugh died in a flood of profanity as Kenneth Wayne jumped toward him. The revolver had caught in the pocket. He was still wrenching at it, still pouring out his blasphemies, in an almost maniacal way now, as Kenneth Wayne caught his wrist.

"I'll help you!" said Kenneth Wayne with a grim smile. "Stand up!"

Still clasping the man's wrist, Kenneth Wayne, with the other hand, jerked Mr. Walters from Manchester to his feet by the collar of the coat. Mr. Walters cried out in pain as his wrist was sharply twisted. The revolver clattered to the road.

Kenneth Wayne stooped, picked up the weapon and put it in his own pocket. And then for a moment he stood again with clenched fists fighting the impulse to launch himself upon the other.

He caught his breath sharply.

"You can thank your God we're not alone here!" He heard himself speaking. It did not sound like his own voice though. There was something very hollow, very strained in it. "Now get out!" He pointed down the road in the direction of the missionary's house. "Get out!"

Mr. Walters from Manchester raised both fists. He shook them like a madman.

"Yes, I'll get out!" In his passion the saliva drooled from his lips. "But I'll make you wish *you* hadn't got out, you damned murderer! I'll see about your case! Yes, and you'll find out I'm not through with either of you!" He turned and started off along the road—then stopped abruptly. "You two had better make the most of the few minutes you've got together!" he flung back with a vicious laugh—and went on again.

The colour came flooding Dorothy Merwood's cheeks to crimson.

"He has been drinking," said Kenneth Wayne hurriedly; and then, a sudden unsteadiness in his voice: "Shall we walk on"—he hesitated—"or perhaps you would rather not? I—I would like to see you far enough on the

way to be sure that nothing of this sort happened again. And besides”—again he hesitated—for her own protection now she must know the truth about Walters and that shot at Glover, even if he must tell her standing here in the road—“and besides, there is something I want to say to you.”

“But you?” she asked quickly.

“I am going that way—by the beach,” he answered.

She looked at him for a moment, and in her eyes, half veiled by their long lashes, he read a strange anxiety and indecision, a troubled questioning.

And then she spoke.

“Yes,” she said in a low voice—and led the way across the road and through the bordering trees to the beach.

He fell into step beside her. She walked with her head a little lowered, a little averted—walked quickly, with nervous haste—walked in silence. And in silence, too, he watched her for a long time—the moonlight on her uncovered head, the bronze of her hair again, the play of her features, a little quiver that came and went on the half-parted lips.

“Miss Merwood,” he said abruptly, “I’m not very good at saying just the right thing at the right time in the right way, I’m afraid. There hasn’t been much ‘drawing-room’ in my life. But I know you’re frightfully ill at ease. And at least I can understand why. You feel perhaps under a little sense of obligation for what has just happened, and because of that you are willing to accept the natural embarrassment of—of—how shall I say it?—of my being here with you now after what took place this afternoon. But I——”

She halted on the instant, and, facing him, stamped her foot angrily upon the sand.

“You are a very poor analyst then—and a most unfair one!” she said vehemently. “My ‘little sense of obligation,’ as you call it, is very heavy—and not alone on my own account. If it had not been for me, no one would have known that you—that you——” She bit at her lips, stumbling for her words.

“That I had escaped?” he supplied quietly.

“Yes,” she said, the anger gone now, her voice a little tremulous; “and also that I shall now be responsible for you being retaken, or at least for a hunt being started for you all over the island.”

He leaned a little toward her.

“You approve, then, of jail breaking?” he asked—and striving to speak lightly found a quick eagerness in his voice instead.

“Oh, I don’t know!” she cried sharply—and started on along the beach again. “I—I don’t know! You have no right to ask me that. One has human feelings that are not always ethical. I wanted to tell you to go when we were back there on the road. But I was afraid that you wouldn’t have understood—as I know now you wouldn’t from what you have said. But now—why don’t you go now—while there is a little time—before it is too late?”

“Not yet,” he said, and shook his head. “Presently, when we get a little farther up the beach where there is a chance of being seen, I am going to let you go on alone—for your own sake; but first, as I’ve said, there is something I want to say to you—and there is also a question that I want to ask. The question is a bit blunt, Miss Merwood; but I’ve already warned you that my tongue has never been taught to stand on ceremony. Do you really believe what you gave me to understand you believed on the verandah this afternoon?”

The colour came sweeping into her cheeks again.

“Why should you ask me that!” she exclaimed protestingly. “It isn’t fair! It isn’t fair after what has happened! What possible difference can it make what I think or believe?”

“It makes a great deal of difference to me, Miss Merwood,” said Kenneth Wayne steadily. “Do you think I’m the sort of man who could go and butcher an old mad native for the sake——”

“No,” she said quickly. “I—I don’t think I ever thought that. Since you force an answer from me, it was more that you were somehow implicated, or knew more than you had admitted—that there was something else behind it all. It was that book in your bag, and no explanation of, not *how*, but *why* it came to be there. It would be so easy to understand that there would be plenty of opportunity for some one to put it there. But why? No one who has committed a crime is going to give over the fortune so obtained to another—unless—unless to an accomplice. I’ve thought and thought about it all afternoon and evening. And—and I can’t find any answer. If it weren’t for that ‘why’ everybody would have laughed at the thought of you having had anything to do with it even if the book were in your bag.”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne with a faint smile. “It’s a bit damning, isn’t it? I’ve thought a little about that myself. And now that I have broken out of jail?”

She did not answer his question.

“What are you going to do now?” she asked instead.

Kenneth Wayne laughed a little shortly.

“I’m going back to my cell,” he said.

Again she came to a sudden halt.

“Because you have been seen?” she said, her voice breaking a little. “Because there isn’t time now to get far enough away before a hue and cry is raised? Oh, I—I——”

“No,” said Kenneth Wayne simply. “Because I always intended to go back.”

“Go back?” she repeated—and again, as though she had not quite understood: “Go back?”

He looked at her for a moment before he answered. Her eyes were wide. There was something of eagerness, something of fear in them—as there had been that afternoon before this miserable accusation had been flung at him—something of anxiety not for herself.

“It’s almost as unbelievable as the defence I made on the verandah,” he said. “An hour ago—or two—I’ve lost track of time—I found an opportunity to get out of my room unobserved. I decided to take it in the hope that I might stumble on some clue to that ‘why’ you were just speaking about. Sometime before morning I intended to return to my room; but having just been seen, and my leave of absence being thereby curtailed, I am going back now—before the bloodhounds start baying. Sounds a bit lame, doesn’t it?”

Again she did not answer his question directly.

“Then you must hurry,” she said, beginning to walk on again; “or the alarm will be raised before you get there.”

Kenneth Wayne shook his head.

“I hardly think so,” he said. “Walters can’t pass us without making a circuit around by the woods on the other side of the road, and that would take time; and, besides, I have reason to feel sure he won’t start what he must believe would be a man-hunt until he has first given certain friends of his to-night time to disperse and get under cover. I’m sure I’ve at least a good fifteen minutes’ leeway.”

"Oh!" she cried quickly. "Then you *have* discovered something to-night!"

Again he shook his head.

"I don't know yet," he said. "Perhaps."

"Yet!" She caught up the word instantly. "Which means that, after all, I have cost you a great deal to-night—that, if it had not been for me, you might have been able to find out a great deal more, instead of being forced back at once now to your room."

"Well, for to-night, yes—if you will have it so," he said, and smiled gravely. "But it might not have amounted to anything at all; and, in any case, I happen to know that what was going on here was to be postponed for a night or two anyway—until the natives' excitement over what occurred to-day has died down. So you see my chances are as good as ever."

"If you are ever able to get out again!" she said under her breath, and as though more to herself than to him. "You will be closely watched after this."

It was very true. He was fully aware of it. It was, in fact, in the last analysis, little short of disaster. But somehow he wasn't sorry. He didn't regret it. In the moonlight her face showed very white and strained—damn that swine Walters!

"Don't you believe it!" he said cheerily. "I'll find a way!"

There were beginning to be signs of movement on the road now, and after a few steps farther Kenneth Wayne stopped.

"I think you would better go on alone from here, Miss Merwood," he said abruptly. "It would be extremely unpleasant for you if any one, native or white, saw and recognised me, and you were in my company. But before you go there is that matter I said I wanted to speak to you about. It is something I wanted to tell you; something that, after what has happened to-night, you must be told for your own protection, though there are still reasons why I do not think it would be well to make it public yet. It was Walters and Fouché who tried to murder Glover the night before last."

"Walters—Fouché!" she gasped in a startled way. "Are—are you sure?"

"Yes," he said. "That much to-night, at least, I made sure of. But the point now is that if Walters is capable of murder he is capable of anything—and having once gone so far with you as he did to-night because he had been drinking, he becomes reckless of any further restraint upon himself. I do not want to alarm you unduly, I do not want to frighten you; I only want you to

realise that there is more than merely a drunken brute to deal with. Couldn't you get your father to pull out of here?"

"Father!" She laughed a little nervously. "Why, quite apart from his leg, he wouldn't go now for anything on account of that book. He is nearly crazy with excitement over it; and I think he would do almost anything in the world to get his own hands on it. I know he's going to try and get Major Peters to let him take a photograph of it to-morrow. And besides all that—how could we go? There's no steamer expected—and no one knows when the next one will call here."

"Yes; that's true," said Kenneth Wayne heavily. "But I wish to God you were out of here!" He held out his hand. "I don't want to presume," he said—and found his voice husky, "I'm under a bit of a cloud myself; but before I say good-night I wish you would promise me to be very careful—not to go out again alone anywhere. Will you?"

She had taken his hand without looking up.

"Yes," she said almost inaudibly.

"Good-night," said Kenneth Wayne.

But now she raised her eyes, and he saw that they were suddenly full of tears.

"Oh, what am I say—what am I to say?" she whispered miserably. "About to-night—the thanks I owe you; about—about everything else! I—I _____"

"Nothing," said Kenneth Wayne simply. "There isn't anything to say—now. Please don't try. For what has happened in the road back there I am happier in a personal way than I can tell you, though I regret it just as strongly the other way on account of you. And for the rest"—he smiled down at her quietly—"I do not think I can do better than quote Gulab Singh, that amazing Grand Vizier of yours: 'We travel upon the Wheel, and strange is Fate. What is written is written. We shall see!' But you must go, Miss Merwood! See, there are a lot of natives coming along the road there. We are too much exposed here. *Quick!*" His voice was suddenly tense. "Walk straight along as though you were simply out for a stroll. Quick—quick—good-night!"

He heard a smothered, helpless little cry, like the sob of a child almost it sounded, as he dropped her hand and moved swiftly back closer in against the tree trunks—and then he saw the slim figure in white move slowly on

along the beach. He watched her—watched her until he could see her no longer. And suddenly he buried his face in his hands.

“Oh, God!” he cried brokenly.

Presently he lifted his face to the moonlight, to the myriad stars blending in exquisite beauty into a cloudless sky of royal blue, and, beneath them, stared at the rippling fringe of tiny waves breaking silver all along the crescent beach—and to his nostrils came the fragrance, the rare, tropical perfume from the woodlands of a thousand growing things. And then he laughed a little, but it was the laugh of one whose heart was over-sore. Glover had not exaggerated. It was a wondrous night—a wonderful night for a walk. Well, he had had his walk.

And now?

He walked on along the beach. There was no special reason to preserve secrecy in his movements now. As soon as Walters had warned Fouché and this Talamori, and the latter had had an opportunity to get to cover, the fact that he, Kenneth Wayne, had “broken jail” would be known. Whether, therefore, it were known now on the way back, or ten or fifteen minutes later, made no material difference.

And so he went on. He made no studied effort to escape observation. But no one seemed to pay any attention to a lone figure walking on the beach, much less recognise who it was. Opposite the hotel there was no one particularly near on the road, and, crossing the latter, he entered the hotel and climbed the stairs, still without challenge or hindrance. There seemed something almost ironical in this now—since now he was indifferent as to whether he were seen or not.

He entered his room, and shut the door behind him. He did not lock it. What was the use! He sat down in the darkness on the edge of the bed. They would be along here shortly—to view the empty cage. Rather neat, that! It would give Mr. Walters from Manchester a jolt at least. He hadn’t thought of that before. He was glad now he hadn’t been seen on the way back.

His head dropped into his hands. There was a great deal to think about—so much that the thoughts came tumbling, tossing and crowding one upon another—confusing him. No, he was tired, that was all—mentally fagged out. Anyway, what was the good of trying to think now—subconsciously his mind would be centred only on the fact that he was waiting for Mr. Walters’ storm to break.

Five minutes passed—another five.

And then suddenly Kenneth Wayne rose to his feet. Here they were now! There was a rush of feet along the front verandah, the heavy knocking upon door panels, excited voices crying out—a sudden babel. And then from some voice raised above this babel he caught a few coherent words:

“. . . Turn out, I tell you! Don't you understand? Major Peters has been done in—murdered—the book's gone again. . . .”

Heavy footsteps came racing around from the front of the verandah; a heavy fist pounded on Kenneth Wayne's door.

Kenneth Wayne passed his hand in a dull way across his forehead.

“What do you want?” he demanded.

“Just wanted to know you were there!” a voice answered gruffly—and the footsteps raced away again.

Kenneth Wayne stood motionless for a moment staring through the black at the door; and then once more he passed his hand in helpless fashion across his forehead. Good God, they hadn't thought of accusing him of this too, had they! There was a limit to— He became suddenly tense again. He *had* been out—and it would soon be *known* by everybody that he had been out.

The hotel was growing quiet—footsteps running down the stairs were receding, dying away. That would be the white boarders running, all running, God knew why! for the scene of the crime! Well, they would be back here presently—when they knew he had been out.

His shoulders squared back. Not in the dark! That wasn't the way he cared to face them.

The lamp was on the little table over there against the wall. He stepped forward, struck a match, reached for the lamp chimney—and his hand, half extended, remained in that position as if suddenly stricken numb and incapable of further movement. The match burned on, burned his fingers, and fell in a tiny, glowing ember upon the floor.

Beside the lamp on the table lay the dragon-covered book.

—XVI—

“THE THREE CROOKS”

A STILLNESS, almost eerie by comparison with the confusion of a moment gone, had settled upon the hotel. The exodus had seemingly been complete. The White Bachelors of the Tropics, in pajamas and half-dressed, if one could judge by the haste in which, on being aroused from slumber, they had scurried away, were gone, responding to a man to the cry of murder.

But the dragon-covered book was *here*.

That was why Major Peters had been murdered.

Or was it?

If Major Peters had been murdered for the *Konchi-kan Kitab* of Kana-ee-a, why hadn't the murderer kept it? Why was the book here?

But why, also, had it been placed in the kit bag after the murder of the old fanatic in the ruined village on the banks of the Cheruchuk River?

For a space of time that endured as some strange, isolated period in his life, set off, apart, unmeasured whether by so many seconds or so many minutes because differentiation had ceased between them, Kenneth Wayne stood there in the darkness. Emotions, the gamut of them, like vultures swooping upon their prey assailed his brain, and their screeching became his own mental hubbub. Shock, anger, surprise, confusion, bewilderment, an impotent passion seeking impotently for the source of what had befallen him that he might wreak vengeance upon it—he knew them all. But dominant was an hysterical impulse to a mad outburst of laughter—to let the place rock with it. An insane man would—because there was insane humour in it.

They had all scurried away . . . scurried away . . . and the book was here. . . .

He jerked his shoulders back, fighting for self-control.

It was a trick of the imagination, an hallucination born out of the fanciful obsessions of his own brain. How the devil could the book be here?

He struck another match—and this time lighted the lamp.

And now, instead of laughter, a smile came twitching at his lips—not one of mirth, but rather of self-pitying mockery. He knew very well that it had been neither hallucination nor a trick of the imagination, but he was conscious that he had almost half expected to find the book had vanished again as mysteriously as it had appeared.

It lay there on the table beside the lamp.

A sinister thing!

He stared at it for a moment, his face suddenly grown old and strained; and then he picked it up, and began to turn it over and over in his hands.

Two generations old—inside, the key to the wealth amassed two generations gone! Fabulous wealth—the hidden treasures of a lifetime of piracy in the days when piracy was most profitable! God knew how many lives it had cost, or how many lives the secrets written within the covers had cost—two generations ago!

He had called it a sinister thing. It was. There was something baleful about its appearance. Its mildewed leather worn entirely off in spots, its moldy-greenish brass, its bestial dragon's mouth gluttonously closed upon its own writhing tail, all seemed horribly in keeping with the two murders for which it was responsible in the last two nights. And yet, too, it possessed an insidious fascination.

He found himself tugging at it mechanically—to open it. But the mouth and tail of the dragon brazed together over the edges of the book were of thick and heavy brass; and, as on that first and only other occasion when he had held the volume in his hands, it resisted, indeed mocked at his attempts. A tool of some sort was required. That was old Kana-ee-a's object when he had conceived the idea in the first place, wasn't it? Mr. Merwood had suggested a file.

Kenneth Wayne looked around him as though he expected his eyes to light upon some suitable instrument placed ready to his hand—and finding none, his gaze fixed on the book again. His brows furrowed deeply. Suppose he did open it . . . opened, it would add weight to the evidence of guilt against him . . . that was why he had murdered Major Peters—to get the book . . . and on this occasion, unlike the last, he had lost no time in possessing himself of the secrets it contained, and in making sure that, at least, it should not again get away from him as a locked book.

All this if it were *found*, here, now, to-night, in this room, damning him for the second time as a ruthless and cold-blooded murderer.

His brain for an instant seemed to grow numb, to become incapable of performing its functions, to be robbed of its reasoning powers, to be inert, as though stunned by some sudden and crushing blow physically struck.

He felt the colour leave his cheeks. He had been out—a prisoner at large all evening. He had no alibi between the time he had met Glover and the time, long afterwards, when he had encountered Dorothy Merwood and Walters back there, *beyond Major Peters' house*, on the road; and here was the book, here in his hands, here in his possession.

What was he to do with it? Like a trip-hammer, his mental faculties virile again, restored, the question thudded at his brain. What was he to do with it . . . what . . . *what* . . . ?

Say that he had found it here? That's what he had said about the kit bag. They might begin to have suspicions regarding his sanity, if that would do any good; but to expect them to believe any such story was to pronounce himself here and now as worse than insane. Hide it, then? No good! They knew, or would know, that he had broken jail, and they would turn the place inside out in a search for it. Well, then, destroy it? How was he going to destroy it? He had no means of destroying it. He couldn't burn it over a lamp chimney—brass wouldn't burn. He couldn't tear it to pieces because he couldn't open it to get at the leaves—and, even if he could, he couldn't tear up the brass.

Why couldn't he open it? There must be something here with which he could force that voracious beast to disgorge its own tail! He laughed out shortly. A lot of difference it would make as far as evidence against him was concerned whether it were opened or not! That was merely a brain vagary of his own. And, anyhow, there *was* a way of getting rid of the book. He could step out there on the verandah and pitch it away, and let who would find it. But if he were going to do that, why not open it first—if he could?

Once more his eyes began to travel speculatively around the room—when suddenly, without warning, without any premonitory sound, the door of his room was flung wide open. A quick, startled exclamation came from his lips. And then he remembered that he had intentionally left the door unlocked when he had come in, and thereafter had given it no second thought. He was staring into the faces of Nicky Fouché and Mr. Walters from Manchester.

For a moment they stood there scowling in vicious menace; then slowly their expressions seemed to change in common to one of rapacious fascination, as though dawning upon them were something that they savagely wanted to believe in spite of the amazement that made them, as it were, suspicious of their own eye-sight. They were not looking at him any more. Their eyes were fixed on the dragon-covered book which he held in his hands.

The Frenchman circled his lips with the tip of his tongue as if on the instant they had become very dry.

“*Mon Dieu!*” he whispered hoarsely.

Mr. Walters from Manchester swallowed hard, the Adam’s-apple suddenly protruding as though he were attempting to gulp down something much too large for his throat.

“My God!” he mumbled—and laughed—and, pushing Monsieur Nicholas Fouché ahead of him into the room, followed and closed the door behind them.

Kenneth Wayne did not move.

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché began to smile and play caressingly with his little goatee. But it was Mr. Walters from Manchester who spoke first.

“Caught with the goods—eh?” he said in an ugly tone. “So that’s the pleasant little job you were up to while you were out! Croaked the poor old major, did you? Well, hand it over!”

Kenneth Wayne deliberately laid the book back on the table behind him.

“Walters,” he said in a low voice, “if you attempt to put a finger on that book, we’ll begin where we left off on the road back there a little while ago. But I think I’d advise you to get out of here—both of you!”

Mr. Walters’ puffy eyes narrowed.

“Quite so!” he sneered. “But there’s two of us now.”

“So I perceive,” said Kenneth Wayne curtly. “Two of as yellow a pair of crooks as are as yet unhanged!”

“Crooks! Unhanged! *Sacré nom!*” Monsieur Nicholas Fouché’s face was screwed up. He screeched out his words as though labouring under some deadly and unmerited insult. “That is too much! I, Nicholas Fouché, to be called a crook—and by a murderer, a—how do you say it?—a twice murderer of whom I am the keeper! Monsieur, I——”

“Ah, shut up!” snarled Mr. Walters. “He’s dead right!” Mr. Walters appeared suddenly to have changed his tactics. He stuck his tongue in his cheek and smirked at Kenneth Wayne. “That’s what we all are—crooks—the three of us. Might as well admit it. That’s the only way to get anywhere. And that being the case I fancy it isn’t going to be necessary to have any fuss. It’s just a matter of a little business arrangement—eh—what? Nicky and I want to get that book without having to tell any lies to keep the whole of Salabam from knowing about it—and we’re willing to pay on the nail. That’s fair enough, isn’t it?”

“Pay for it!” Again Nicky Fouché’s voice rose shrilly. “No! *Jamais de la vie!* Why should we pay? We have him—how do you say?—cold.”

Mr. Walters whirled savagely on his companion.

“Blast you!” he said fiercely. “Hold your tongue! You screech like an Australian cockatoo! Any one within half a mile could hear you.”

“So!” retorted Monsieur Nicholas Fouché hotly, but in a more guarded voice. “I screech, do I? But nevertheless we will pay nothing!”

Kenneth Wayne smiled coldly at the two. He was leaning back against the table now, his hands thrust with apparent nonchalance into the pockets of his coat—in one of which pockets reposed the revolver he had taken from Mr. Walters of Manchester half an hour ago. It would come to a fight, of course, unless some or all of the boarders returned in the meantime. Also it would make a rather pretty fight—Fouché, lithe and wiry, was not to be despised; and, besides, neither of the two would hesitate to use weapons if they possessed them. His brows drew together suddenly. He thought he had caught, very faintly, an extraneous sound from somewhere, an irregular, almost inaudible *tap-tap-tap*, it seemed, like some one knocking on a wall perhaps, or driving a nail, or——

Mr. Walters from Manchester was speaking again.

“Frenchy always goes up in the air when he thinks anything’s going to cost him something that he could get out of paying for,” said Mr. Walters of Manchester with ingratiating confidence to Kenneth Wayne. “They’re an excitable race. Now, you listen—and you, too, Frenchy. I haven’t made it public yet that you’ve been out of here to-night, Wayne, and I fancy *she* hasn’t either. On the way back I heard what had happened to Peters and I twigged *why* you had been out, but I had a little business of my own to attend to with Nicky Fouché here first. See? Then, never mind where we’d come from, Nicky and I spotted the light shining out of your window blind,

and we thought it was blasted queer, and sneaked up here to see what was what, and——” He paused abruptly. “*What’s that?*” he demanded sharply.

The faint *tap-tap-tap* had become audible again. It lasted for a moment, and then ceased.

Kenneth Wayne still leaned negligently against the table, the dragon-covered book behind him. It mattered very little what the sound was, except perhaps that it might delay Mr. Walters from Manchester in reaching that point in the negotiations where a show of force would succeed mere words. Personally, he inclined toward a conclusion of a physical nature. But in the scuffle it was quite on the cards that one of the two might be able to snatch the book and get away with it, and, wherever else it went, he did not propose that it should pass into the possession of either of these two if he could help it; so, rather than force the issue now, since the book was in evidence in any case, it seemed the better judgment to spar, if possible, for time. It couldn’t be very long before some of the men anyhow would be coming back from Major Peters’.

“You heard it, didn’t you?” Mr. Walters from Manchester demanded again. “Like some one knocking somewhere, eh? What was it?”

Kenneth Wayne shrugged his shoulders.

“I really don’t know,” he said indifferently.

“There it is again!” exclaimed Mr. Walters from Manchester.

“Pouf!” said Nicky Fouché, a sullen displeasure still in evidence in his voice. “For me it is a hammock stick that knocks itself with the breeze against the verandah.”

“Maybe it is,” agreed Mr. Walters. “But take a look outside anyway.”

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché opened the door and thrust out his head.

“There’s nothing out here,” he said tersely after a moment, and shut the door again.

“All right!” said Mr. Walters. “It’s not of much account anyhow, I fancy. We’ll carry on. It won’t take long coming to terms, I’ll stake a bet or two at odds, but we want to get through before any of ’em come back—from you know where. I haven’t got any love for you, you understand”—he scowled suddenly at Kenneth Wayne—“but I never let personal feelings interfere with business, and I don’t put you down for a fool. You know the mess you’re in”—he circled his finger with a lugubrious motion around his neck—“that’s plain as a pike-staff. Very good! Here’s the bargain, and here’s how

we pay. You hand over the book and keep your mouth shut about it, and we'll get you out of the mess."

Kenneth Wayne selected a cigarette and lighted it. Then his hands went back into his pockets again.

"I don't quite follow you," he observed caustically between puffs.

Mr. Walters from Manchester accepted the remark literally.

"Well, maybe you don't—at least not all the way," he admitted. "But I'll make it plain enough in two breaths. When I saw you out to-night I thought at first you were trying to escape, and I thought you were a fool because you'd ought to have known you hadn't a ghost of a chance of getting away in the long run. But now I've tumbled to your game. Pretty neat! Slip out and croak old Peters, and cop the book, and get back here with it—which you did. But I must say I wouldn't have thought you'd have let a girl put the crimp into a swell job that was already done."

Kenneth Wayne straightened up slightly. His face was set a little harder; something seemed to be setting his blood curiously a-tingle.

"No; I don't suppose you would," he said in a monotone.

"But that's done now," said Mr. Walters from Manchester, with a coarse laugh; "and we're here, and so're you, and so's the book. You haven't got a hope of not being strung up for one of the two murders unless you make your escape now—and that's what we're offering you."

"Really!" Kenneth Wayne shrugged his shoulders again. "But I thought you just said I wouldn't have any chance of getting away in the long run anyhow."

"And neither you would," said Mr. Walters quickly. "Not alone. That's what's up to us. We'll take care of that. We've got means of getting you off the island, and no one the wiser. You don't think we're trying to play you for a sucker, do you? There's a lot of things going on around here you don't know anything about."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Kenneth Wayne, with a thin smile.

"Of what?" There was exaggerated patience in Mr. Walters' tones, as though he were striving to deal in fatherly fashion with a refractory child. "About our not playing straight with you? Say, I——"

"No," said Kenneth Wayne, and his eyes roved with studied insolence over the other's face. "About the things—I don't know anything about."

Mr. Walters from Manchester thrust his head forward from between his shoulders with a sudden, vicious jerk.

“What d’ye mean?” he snarled.

“What I say,” said Kenneth Wayne curtly.

For a moment, fists clenched, the red flaming into his cheeks, his face working in ugly fashion, Mr. Walters stared at Kenneth Wayne. Then he gulped, swallowed hard, and indulged in a croaking laugh.

“Well, maybe you do, and maybe you don’t,” he said. “If you do, so much the better, because then you’ll know we’re able to get you out of this the way we said. So hand that book over and we’ll make a start.”

Kenneth Wayne was engaged in a critical examination of the toe of his shoe.

“And if I refuse?” he inquired without looking up.

“*Tonnerre!*” Monsieur Nicholas Fouché burst out. “Refuse! Then we will do what I wanted to do at the first. Eh—you understand? We will take it!”

“Of course!” agreed Kenneth Wayne softly. “But doesn’t it strike you that you could hardly expect under the circumstances, if you took it, that this little world of Salabam here would remain in ignorance of your possession of the volume? Or perhaps you and Mr. Walters propose to take advantage of the same method of getting away from here that you offer me—disappear, in a word, to-night?”

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché edged forward, placing himself now between his companion and Kenneth Wayne. He was smiling in a tolerant, supercilious way, fondling again his goatee.

“No, monsieur; not at all!” he said blandly. “Monsieur pretends to be more dense than he is, eh? We will not disappear—it is not necessary. And for the other point, it was of that I was talking when we began our very pleasant little conversation. Is it not so? We take the book—but monsieur will understand that we deny taking it. There was no book to take. Who will say there was? Not monsieur, I am sure. If monsieur says he had the book here, monsieur confesses that he cut the throat of that estimable citizen, Major Peters. *Quelle affaire déplorable!* And monsieur, I am certain, will not forget that he is already accused of murder, and that mademoiselle will be obliged to swear that she saw him out there on the road. So, monsieur”—he extended his hand—“the book, if you please.”

Kenneth Wayne’s smile was not inviting.

“No!” he said laconically.

“No?” repeated Monsieur Nicholas Fouché. His eyebrows went up pityingly. “Ah, too bad!”

“You’d better think it over!” Mr. Walters broke in roughly. “Frenchy’s right! We’ll give you another chance. The book’s no good to you if you’re hanged, and all you’ve got to do to save your precious neck is to hand it over. We’ll get you away from here. What do you say—for the last time?”

Kenneth Wayne’s hands came suddenly from his pockets, the revolver in one of them.

“*No!*” he flung out—and shoved the revolver savagely into their faces. “I’ll keep the book—at least from you! And I’ll stay here!”

Before the levelled weapon, Monsieur Nicholas Fouché with a startled exclamation, bumped back against Mr. Walters.

“*Sacré nom!*” he cried out. “Where did you get that?”

Mr. Walters was mumbling half under his breath.

“Damn it,” mumbled Mr. Walters, “I’d forgotten he had it. I——” And then Mr. Walters from Manchester acted characteristically. Quite safe himself from the bite of a bullet, with a sudden, violent shove he sent Monsieur Nicholas Fouché flying against Kenneth Wayne. “Grab him, Frenchy! Hold him!” he screamed out. “Hold him, while I get the book!”

With the impact, quick, unexpected, Kenneth Wayne, half thrown from his feet, was flung back against the table, and, his wrist striking sharply against the table’s edge, the revolver was knocked from his hand to the floor. But even as he staggered, he struck and struck again, jabbing short-arm blows with his left hand into the face and neck of the Frenchman, who, taken by surprise himself, was clinging more as a dead-weight than anything else to Kenneth Wayne in an effort to preserve his own balance.

In a moment it became a *mêlée*.

Mr. Walters made a leap for the book on the table, but Kenneth Wayne, managing to fling the Frenchman aside, met the rush with a right to Mr. Walters’ jaw. And then they were on him together. They caught at his legs, they caught at his neck, they clawed at him, rained their blows upon him. Once they circled him around away from both the book and the revolver, which latter lay just beside one of the table legs, and each in turn made a frantic grab for the book—and missed. He fought his way back again to a position in front of the table.

Queer! Perhaps it was the trickle of blood over his eyes that distorted his vision. A face seemed to be thrust close against the window blind—the slats seemed to move. Ridiculous—absurd—impossible! *It was Mr. Merwood's face.* How could it be Mr. Merwood's face. . . . only it was Mr. Merwood's face just the same. . . .

He was panting, gasping for his breath as he fought now. In and out his arms worked like steel piston-rods battering at his antagonists. If he could only keep them from closing in on him together again! Ah, that was better! Monsieur Nicholas Fouché went reeling back from a smashing blow behind the ear. And Frenchy had evidently had enough of it, for he was sending a curious whining note, like that of a hurt puppy, throbbing through the room. Now there was only Walters! A sort of unholy joy rose in Kenneth Wayne's soul. Just Walters! No—here was Frenchy—the whine gone—screaming like a maniac—a chair uplifted above his head! And at the same moment, with a yell, Mr. Walters lunged forward viciously.

The chair crashed downward, broke through the guard of Kenneth Wayne's upflung arm, and struck him with terrific force across the head. He felt his knees sag. He heard a sort of chorused howl of triumph, and then, as he lurched sideways, his eyes fell upon the revolver on the floor not a yard away. Again the Frenchman struck with the chair, but now Kenneth Wayne, pretending to evade the blow, dropped full to the floor, snatched at the revolver, and, without aim, fired instantly.

Mr. Walters from Manchester, his hand stretched out, clawing fingers almost grasping the coveted book, drew back instinctively at the shot. Monsieur Nicholas Fouché, the chair poised above his head for still another blow, dropped it with a startled cry, and leaped backward toward the door.

And then Kenneth Wayne was on his feet again, the revolver muzzle thrust into Mr. Walters' face. His head was swimming, going around like a top. He was fighting, not so much against these two men now, as against a sense of giddiness that came surging upon him in swiftly recurring waves.

"I made a mistake in not using this in the first place," he said thickly. "I—I'll give you one minute to get on the other side of that door!"

Mr. Walters from Manchester, one of his puffy eyes quite closed, his face working in ungovernable rage, began to retreat slowly. Monsieur Nicholas Fouché was already at the door, pawing at the knob to open it.

"Come on!" he screamed frantically. "Quick! *Sacré nom—sacré nom—sacré nom!* It is in his face! He will shoot to kill!"

The Frenchman wrenched the door open, and darted outside.

Mr. Walters in his retreat had reached the threshold. His fury found words.

“You think you’ve won, eh?” His voice rose and fell dementedly, out of control. “Well, you’ve lost! You fool—you *damned* fool! You had your chance and you wouldn’t take it. Now I’ll get you, you gold-hunting, damsel-protecting swine, and I’ll get that book—and God help any white man or woman on this island who gets in the road or tries to stop it! I’ll let hell loose, you understand? And you won’t have long to wait!”

The doorway was empty.

Kenneth Wayne was dimly conscious of the sound of Mr. Walters’ and Nicky Fouché’s footsteps running together along the verandah and then down the stairs. He was very unsteady on his feet. His head was swimming around worse than ever. He wasn’t going to faint, was he—like a woman! Won! Of course, he’d won! There was the book on the table. What had Walters meant? White man or woman . . . let hell loose . . . Talamori—was that it? . . . turn Talamori loose. . . . God, if he did that!

Kenneth Wayne reached out suddenly for support, to steady himself—and knocked the lamp over. It smashed on the floor. That would set the hotel on fire . . . he must put it out . . . no, it went out of itself . . . it was dark . . . everything was dark. . . .

He was first conscious that he was struggling to raise himself on his elbow. Pieces of the broken lamp chimney crackled beneath his body. Queer! Infernally queer sensation! He hadn’t seemed to have lost consciousness completely because he seemed to have heard a lot of sounds—swishing sounds, *tap-tap-tapping* sounds all around him. Perhaps he had lost consciousness though, perhaps that was what it was like when one keeled over—he had been hopelessly dazed anyway. Nasty crack, that! But his head was clearing now—like a prize fighter, he told himself, coming to after a knock-out.

How long had he been lying here on the floor? Idiotic question! How could he tell? It might have been a minute, or it might have been ten—or more. Anyway, he was quite all right again except for a severe, throbbing ache in his head, and there was no mistake or doubt about hearing sounds now—some one was running along the verandah, and there was a light coming—Walters probably—Walters back with Talamori—hell let loose—He groped about for the revolver, found it, succeeded in getting to his feet,

and, finding himself beside the bed, leaned against the foot-board for support.

A light showed in the doorway. No; it wasn't Walters—nor Talamori, nor Fouché. It was Dorothy Merwood, and in her hand she carried a lamp. She seemed to be uncommonly agitated. She held the lamp unsteadily; her eyes were wide and frightened, staring out of a face that was almost deathly pale.

“Mr. Wayne! Mr. Wayne!” she called out. “Father is—” She checked herself with a quick, low cry, as her glance travelled swiftly around the room and over Kenneth Wayne himself. “Oh, what has happened here?” she cried wildly.

Kenneth Wayne smiled faintly.

“Not very much, Miss Merwood,” he said. “Just Mr. Walters and Monsieur Fouché after The Locked Book there.”

She stared at him helplessly.

“The Locked Book!” The exclamation seemed to come involuntarily, as though she had not heard aright. “The Locked Book!” She took a step forward into the room. “Where?”

“There,” said Kenneth Wayne, and pointed to the table—and his hand, extended, remained grotesquely inert in that position.

The Locked Book was gone.

—XVII—

A LIAR OF PARTS

THE desire to laugh insanely possessed Kenneth Wayne. He gave vent to it.

“It’s gone!” he said, and his voice made a harsh, croaking sound.

She seemed to shiver a little as she looked at him.

“But it couldn’t ever have been here—it couldn’t!” she cried out.

“It was,” he said.

“I don’t believe it!” she declared with suddenly quivering lips. “You’ve been hurt—you don’t know what you are saying. It just simply couldn’t! Major Peters was murdered for that book while we were out, and—” She stopped, a sort of dumb, helpless terror and dismay in her face.

“Yes, that’s it—while we were out.” He caught up her words with almost brutal emphasis. “I was out. Once it was in my kit bag after an old native fanatic had been murdered; to-night it was in my room here after Major Peters had been murdered—and I had been out.”

For an instant she turned her head away, and then she faced him steadily.

“You are trying to put the worst complexion on it you can,” she said, a sudden spirited defiance in her voice. “It isn’t true. I don’t believe it. I don’t believe that it was ever here at all.”

Kenneth Wayne took an impulsive step forward.

“Do you mean that, Miss Merwood?” he said in a quick, eager way. “I—” And then he choked back the words on his lips, and the harsh laugh was in his voice again. “And if it were? Would you still stand here in this room with me—trust yourself that far with a man who will certainly now be accused of two murders instead of one?”

“After what has happened to-night—a little while ago,” she said in a low voice, “I could hardly have any personal fears. But—but—oh, I do not understand!”

Kenneth Wayne passed his hand heavily across his eyes.

“Nor I,” he said. “The book was here in this room when I got back. Mr. Walters and Monsieur Fouché will need no pressing to corroborate that—since they were unable to get away with it themselves. But you must have heard the row in here for yourself.”

She shook her head.

“No,” she said. “I’ve been downstairs at the back of the hotel—in the kitchen.”

“But I thought that was why you had come here,” he said.

“No,” she said quickly. “It’s father. Something has happened to him. There isn’t any one in the hotel; they’re all down at—at Major Peters’. I—I came for help. I—I thought if you had got out of your room once you—you could come to him.”

“Your father!” He was standing close beside her now. Mr. Merwood’s face at the window! The book gone! His voice rose unconsciously in an abrupt and peremptory tone: “Where is he?”

She drew back a little, startled.

“Why do you look at me like that?” she asked tremulously. “Is—is anything else the matter? He’s in bed, of course. Why do you ask?”

In bed! Kenneth Wayne swept his hand again back and forth across his eyes. In bed! It was all very strange!

“My God,” he mumbled, “I don’t know!” Then, quickly, forcing a smile: “But we shouldn’t be standing here, Miss Merwood, if he needs help.”

“Oh, I know! I know that!” she said a little pitifully. “But I’ve no right to ask it now. I didn’t know what had happened here. You are hurt yourself, and—and the book——”

“Nonsense!” he answered quietly. “I’m all right now. It was just a little attention of Frenchy’s—a crack on the head with a chair. I keeled over a bit after they had taken to their heels, that’s all. And as for the book—it’s gone. It isn’t under the bed, or anything like that. There’s no good hunting for it. It’s been taken while I was seeing stars. We’ll go to your father at once, Miss Merwood.”

For just an instant she hesitated, then she turned and led the way out of the room.

“It’s very good of you,” she said in little above a whisper, “for I am very, very anxious.”

He found himself, a little to his own surprise, walking quite steadily along the verandah beside her; he experienced a slight sense of weakness, but that appeared to be wearing off rapidly.

“Tell me what happened,” he said.

“There isn’t very much that I can tell,” she said, speaking hurriedly now. “When the news came about Major Peters and everybody was running about—as you know, for I heard Mr. Tomlinson go to your room—father became terribly excited. He is very excitable anyway, and at times, especially since he has been ill, works himself up into a nervous state that quite frightens me. It sounds absurd of course, but tea, a cup of strong, hot tea, always seems to have a more quieting effect on him than anything else. I couldn’t find any of the native boys, and there didn’t seem to be any one left in the hotel. So I went downstairs—by the staircase on the other side—to boil some water. There wasn’t any fire, and I had to make one. I must have been down there quite a long while. Once I thought I heard a shot fired, but I wasn’t sure where it came from. I thought it was from outside somewhere; I even thought I might be mistaken altogether. It was still quite a little while after that when I came upstairs again, and—” She broke off abruptly as, reaching the door of Mr. Merwood’s room, she opened it, and, entering, faced Kenneth Wayne in an agitated way. “There isn’t anything more to tell,” she said in a suddenly lowered voice. “I—I found him just as you see him now. And—and I was terribly frightened. I spoke to him and he did not answer; and then I tried to give him a little brandy, but I couldn’t make him take it—and then I ran for you.”

As she set the lamp down on the table, Kenneth Wayne’s first glance fell upon the figure on the bed. Mr. Merwood was breathing very heavily, and was obviously in a comatose condition. And then Kenneth Wayne gave a sudden and involuntary start as he caught sight of a pair of crude and rather clumsy crutches that were leaning against the wall near the head of the bed. He glanced quickly at Dorothy Merwood. She was bending over her father, begging him to speak to her.

There was no response.

Kenneth Wayne, too, leaned over the bed.

“Doctor Pearson isn’t back yet, I suppose?” he said.

“No,” she answered. “Not unless he came back late to-night, for otherwise he would have come to see father this evening.”

Kenneth Wayne nodded.

“We’ll try a little more brandy,” he said quietly. “Will you give it to me, please, Miss Merwood—and a spoon if you have one.” And then, as she complied and he forced a spoonful of spirits through Mr. Merwood’s shut teeth: “I had no idea your father was so far recovered that he was able to get about again.”

“Why, what do you mean?” she asked in a sort of helpless amazement. “He isn’t—very far from it.”

Kenneth Wayne indicated the crutches with a slight movement of his head.

“Oh, those!” she exclaimed. “One of the natives made them for him and brought them here two or three days ago; it will be another week yet before he can even attempt to use them. And now—oh, I—I am so anxious! The brandy doesn’t seem to have any effect. What—what do you think is the matter, Mr. Wayne?”

The blue eyes were full of tears; her lips, though she strove bravely to control them, were quivering. She seemed all at once to be a very lonely and forlorn little figure. An impulse, a great, yearning impulse, came to him to put his arm around the drooping shoulders, and draw her to him and comfort her. Impulse! What right had he to any impulse such as that! He swung his hand swiftly across his eyes. He was being stirred by something wide of impulse now. He was suddenly conscious that in some way or other he must manage to get her out of the room for a few minutes—that there was something here she must not discover.

He leaned closer over Mr. Merwood, hiding his own face from the girl. His brain seemed to be working in quick, stabbing thrusts, as he gave Mr. Merwood more brandy. The *tap-tap-tap* of a little while ago wasn’t any hammock stick swaying in the breeze and knocking against the verandah; and it wasn’t absurd, or fanciful, or visionary, that face at the window. It was all quite logical and clear now in view of those crutches. He could reconstruct every detail of the scene almost as though he had played Mr. Merwood’s part in it himself. And he remembered, too, for they came flashing back now, Dorothy Merwood’s words on the beach that evening in reference to her father and *The Locked Book*; they had been spoken nervously, but there had been an element of seriousness underlying them

that seemed now to have made them almost prophetic. "He is nearly crazy with excitement over it, and I think he would do almost anything in the world to get his own hands on it." Not for its intrinsic value—the "pull" of science was as strong as vulgar cupidity. He remembered also Mr. Merwood's eagerness to get hold of the book that afternoon on the verandah, and his extreme reluctance to let go of it again. And to-night, already excited by the news of Major Peters' murder, Mr. Merwood must have heard, while he lay in bed and while Dorothy Merwood had gone downstairs, enough of what was going on in his, Kenneth Wayne's room, to tempt him to what he did. He had managed to get on his crutches, gone down the verandah, looked through the window, seen what was going on, seen Mr. Walters and Nicky Fouché run for it after the revolver shot, seen the lamp knocked over as he, Kenneth Wayne, had gone down on the floor, stolen in, got the book, and returned here. And here was the result. Weak from a long illness, together with Heaven alone knew what damage he had done to his leg and the perhaps excruciating pain incident thereto, the man was in a state of utter exhaustion, of acute prostration—the only marvel was that he had managed to get back into bed again before he had collapsed!

But where was the book?

"What—what do you think is the matter, Mr. Wayne?" Dorothy Merwood repeated her question anxiously. "You said the other night that—that you knew something about medicine."

"Only in a very general way," he answered. "But I do not think you need to be seriously alarmed. I think that over-excitement has been too much for him in his weakened condition. I am sure that he will come around all right." He felt Mr. Merwood's hands. They were quite cold. Where had the man hidden the book? Where was it? "His hands seem to be a little cold, and you said you were heating some water"—he did not look at Dorothy Merwood as he spoke—"do you think there is any more downstairs?"

"Yes," she said. "I left some. It should still be hot."

"I wonder, then, if you wouldn't fill a hot-water bottle—you've got one, haven't you?"

"Yes," she said quickly. "I'll go at once."

He heard her open the door hurriedly, and go out. He did not look up.

A hot-water bottle! Kenneth Wayne gnawed a little at his lips. Well, he had got her out of the room! His subterfuge had succeeded—for, at bottom, it was nothing but a subterfuge, though medicinally it was genuinely the best

suggestion he had to offer. He didn't like it. He hadn't cared to meet her eyes. It seemed a mean sort of thing to do, as though he were trading on her anxiety, taking advantage of her fears for her father. But what else could he have done? He did not want her to know. That would have hurt her. He did not want any one else to know. There was no end to the miserable possibilities that might result. But above all there was Mr. Walters and Nicky Fouché. They would search everywhere for that accursed book—and stop at nothing to obtain it. If they found it here, or, worse still perhaps, came by any ill chance to even a suspicion that the old scientist had it, they

Kenneth Wayne's hands were searching up and down the length of the bed beneath the covers. Mr. Merwood still lay prostrate, motionless, breathing heavily. Kenneth Wayne frowned a little anxiously as, while he searched, his eyes rested on the other. The man must have been like this for a good fifteen minutes now, if not more. He did not like the other's condition.

The book wasn't hidden in the bed or under the mattress.

Hastily he began to search elsewhere.

There was a trunk standing against the wall. He found it unlocked and lifted the lid. The book was not in the top compartment. He removed the tray. The result was the same. He replaced the tray, closed the trunk, and one after another opened the bureau drawers. There was no sign of the book.

He was working quickly now.

The washstand was equally bare of results. In the corner a cretonne hanging curtained off a space that did duty as a wardrobe. He searched here hurriedly amongst a heterogeneous assortment of boots, clothes and other belongings. Nothing!

And yet the book must be here somewhere. The old scientist had hidden it very craftily—that was obvious—but it must be here somewhere.

Kenneth Wayne was down on his hands and knees now, peering under the bed. Still nothing! He was becoming desperate in his hurry. There wasn't much time left. Dorothy Merwood ought even to have been back by now. Where was it? It couldn't be anywhere else but here in the room somewhere.

He jumped suddenly to his feet. Some one *was* coming. And not Dorothy Merwood alone. He heard the footsteps of at least three or four people. She had left the door open. He sprang across the room to close it—and stopped. What was the use? They were coming along the verandah now.

The light was streaming out from this room here. To close the door was little less than silly. They would see the light shut off, and they would know in any case that it wasn't Dorothy Merwood who had done it, for he could hear her voice among the others now. Quite so! He nodded a little grimly to himself. She had met whoever it was, or they had met her, coming up the stairs. Well, at any rate, the book was *well* hidden—if he could find any consolation in that fact!

He stepped out over the threshold. In the moonlight he recognised the faces of the little group coming toward him. There were three of the White Bachelors. They were half clad, as he had supposed they would be in their hurry to respond to the call to Major Peters' house. The tall, cadaverous looking chap was Tomlinson, the store-keeper; the short chap was Therber; and the one with the red hair was Donohue. Besides these there was Mr. Walters. Mr. Walters of Manchester was at their head. That was curious. He did not quite understand that. Behind them all was Dorothy Merwood. He was conscious of an inner twinge, a recurring prick of conscience, as he noticed she was carrying a hot-water bottle.

A sort of triumphant and relieved yelp came from Mr. Walters.

"There he is! I was afraid he would have bolted and taken his chances in the woods," shouted Mr. Walters raucously. "Go on—get him! And this time he'd better be put where he can't do any more harm!"

But Mr. Walters did not attempt to participate in the course of action that he advocated. As the others halted before the door, Mr. Walters hurried on along the verandah. Kenneth Wayne's lips twitched in grim amusement. Mr. Walters' objective was obviously his, Kenneth Wayne's, room—and the book!

Dorothy Merwood came forward, as the others stepped aside to allow her to pass. She paused for an instant beside Kenneth Wayne.

"The doctor has come back," she said quickly. "He is at Major Peters'. One of the men has gone for him."

"I am so glad," Kenneth Wayne answered gravely, as she passed on to the bedside.

Tomlinson, the tall man, stared for a moment with puckered brow at Kenneth Wayne.

"I say," he said sharply, "what's all this about—this story of Walters? We were coming back up the road from Major Peters' house when we met Walters and Fouché. They say you've got The Locked Book, that you're the

man who killed Major Peters, and that you tried to shoot them as well. It's a bit of an ugly indictment, Wayne—worse than the previous one. What have you got to say?"

Kenneth Wayne shrugged his shoulders.

"Before I answer your question," he said coolly, "I'd like to ask one myself. I saw Walters here, but I haven't seen his partner in this charge against me. Where is Monsieur Fouché?"

"He went on down the road to tell the others," replied Tomlinson curtly.

"Oh!" said Kenneth Wayne a little blankly. He could not quite piece it together. He had interpreted Mr. Walters' threat literally. He had expected the two to bring this native ally of theirs on the scene—not their fellow-whites. What else could one have understood by "letting hell loose on the island," and including in the threat any white man or woman who might interfere?

Donohue, the red-haired man, pressed forward.

"Well, we're waiting!" he snapped. "What have you got to say?"

But Kenneth Wayne had no opportunity to answer—it was Mr. Walters from Manchester who spoke, as he came running back along the verandah.

"He's hidden it somewhere!" cried Mr. Walters savagely. He halted, panting, in front of Kenneth Wayne. "Where is it? Where did you put it?" he snarled.

Kenneth Wayne pushed the man contemptuously away, and turned abruptly to the others.

"Mr. Merwood has been taken ill," he said coldly. "Can't we settle this somewhere else, and allow Miss Merwood to close the door?"

"No, we can't!" It was Mr. Walters from Manchester again. "She's mixed up a bit in this herself, and I'm not so sure she couldn't put her hands on the book itself right now if she wanted to." He sneered suddenly. "The two of them seem to have been a lot together to-night!"

Dorothy Merwood had quite obviously overheard. She appeared now in the doorway. Her face had no colour in it, but her head was thrown back and her small fists were clenched. She looked steadily at Mr. Walters from Manchester.

"How dare you say that!" she cried passionately. "I have not seen the book. I know nothing about it. My father was taken ill. If Mr. Wayne is here,

it is because I asked him to come and help me.”

“Yes; quite so!” sneered Mr. Walters again. “Well, whether you know where it is or not, Major Peters was murdered and the book taken; and, whether you like it or not, you’ll do your bit in proving who committed the murder. Did Wayne here break out of his room to-night, or didn’t he; and did you see him, say, an hour ago down on the road there just past Major Peters’ house?”

Dorothy Merwood’s face seemed to go still whiter. She passed her hand as though in sudden weariness across her forehead.

But it was Kenneth Wayne who spoke.

“You need not answer, Miss Merwood,” he said quietly. He faced the others. “It is quite true. I did break out. And I was where he says I was.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Walters, “and——”

“You beast!” Dorothy Merwood seemed suddenly to have been metamorphosed into another being. The blood was sweeping in a great crimson flood into her cheeks; the blue eyes, wide, were flashing, full of fire. “You beast!” she cried. “You coward! Tell *all* the truth, then! Tell them you attacked me on the road, and that I called for help, and that Mr. Wayne came and knocked you down! Tell them that you tried to shoot him! Tell them everything!”

She stood breathless, panting heavily. The White Bachelors looked from one to another, and then none too pleasantly at Mr. Walters.

But Mr. Walters from Manchester did not lose his sang-froid.

“Oh, yes,” he said with oily tolerance. “In a sense that’s true. But ‘attacked’ is a strong word. I had no intention whatever of doing Miss Merwood the slightest harm. She was alone and walking back from the missionary’s. The trouble started over nothing. She got huffy and on her high horse because I offered to take her arm. I dare say I shouldn’t have done it, but I persisted more to tease her than anything else. And as for the shooting, Wayne was an escaped prisoner. He had been warned by Major Peters. I didn’t know what had happened then, and it was the only way, at the revolver point, which was the idea I had in mind, of getting him back into confinement again.”

“Oh!” Dorothy Merwood cried out abhorrently. And then she was struggling helplessly for words: “I—I——”

Kenneth Wayne turned toward her.

“Please go into your room, Miss Merwood,” he pleaded. “Please do. You have quite enough to worry you without this. And, besides, I think I hear some of the others coming. Yes”—as another little group of four men appeared on the verandah—“and that’s the doctor there, too, isn’t it?”

She did not answer—only nodded her head.

A moment later the newcomers reached the door, and one of them, obviously Doctor Pearson, with a low, quiet greeting to Dorothy Merwood, drew her at once inside the room, and the door was closed behind them.

—XVIII—

HARE AND HOUNDS

THE augmented group, as though by common consent, began to move away in the direction of that corner of the verandah just around which was Kenneth Wayne's room.

Kenneth Wayne's lips were straight and hard. Walters! He had a new side-light on Walters—and one that augured for himself anything but good. Mr. Walters, as a liar, an accomplished, versatile and smooth-tongued liar, was more dangerous in that rôle than any other—and Mr. Walters wasn't through yet. Kenneth Wayne looked around him, frowning suddenly. Where was Nicky Fouché? It was strange, if Nicky Fouché had gone to carry the story to these men who had just arrived, that he had not come back with them! Well, did it matter? Mr. Walters was a host—of a sort—in himself. Kenneth Wayne braced his shoulders back a little. He was already condemned, of course. These men, as they looked at him, made no attempt to disguise the savage repugnance that was in their eyes and faces. He noticed that, as they moved along, they kept him surrounded, well in their midst. He heard Tomlinson explaining to the new arrivals what had transpired. And then as they reached the corner of the verandah, they halted of one accord as Mr. Walters' voice broke out loudly again.

"What happened back there on the road hasn't got anything to do with it anyway," said Mr. Walters viciously, "except that it's proof he broke out of his room and was down there. And when I tell you, on top of that, that Fouché and I caught him in his room a little later with the book in his hands, it's enough, isn't it? He's as guilty as hell! He broke out of here, went down and killed Major Peters, and got the book. He's got it now—only he's hidden it somewhere. It's up to you to make him tell you where it is."

"Wayne," said Tomlinson sternly, "this looks pretty bad. If you've got anything to say, we're willing to listen."

They were pressing in closer about him. Kenneth Wayne looked around on the ring of unfriendly faces steadily for an instant before he answered.

"If I broke out of my room, and murdered Major Peters, and got the book," he demanded, "why should I have come back here and brought the book with me after having been seen?"

"Because," sneered Mr. Walters promptly, "you didn't expect any one to find you with the book in your hands. And here was the safest place for it—and the last place any one would look. The fact that you were seen away from here to-night wouldn't alone prove you the murderer—but the book, with that added, does."

There was a muttered growl of assent from the men gathered around Kenneth Wayne.

"How did you come to find Wayne with the book, Walters?" Tomlinson asked brusquely.

"It's simple enough," Mr. Walters replied smoothly. "I didn't hear anything about the murder until I was almost back here at the hotel—that was after the row on the road, you understand? Fouché was still here—everybody else seemed to have gone. Fouché had been out somewhere and he hadn't heard about the murder either. I told him about it, and we were just going down to Major Peters' place ourselves when we noticed a light in Wayne's window. I thought that was infernally queer after what had happened because I believed then that he had only broken out in order to bolt, being fool enough to think he'd have a chance to escape by hiding somewhere on the island in spite of what Major Peters had told him. So we went up softly to his room, opened the door—it wasn't locked—and found him with the book in his hands. He seemed to be trying to get it open. We tried to take it away from him, and our intention was, too, to tie him up. He put up a fight, and finally he began firing with the revolver he'd got away from me down there on the road, and drove us from the room. That's all."

"Is it!" Kenneth Wayne, a sudden fury flaming in his face, launched himself toward Mr. Walters—and found himself thrown roughly back by several pairs of hands. He struggled for his voice that was choked with passion. "It's all, is it?" he cried. "Your memory's poor, Walters, you lying hypocrite! What did you offer me for the book, if I——"

"Ah!" bawled Mr. Walters in jeering triumph. "So you admit you had it, eh?"

"I have not denied it," Kenneth Wayne answered furiously. "I have no intention of denying it. I had it—and you and Fouché offered me my liberty for it if I would hand it over to you and say nothing. You told me you had

means of getting me away from this island that no one else knew anything about. It was only when I refused that you tried to take it—figuring that if you got it I would still say nothing because I wouldn't dare do anything else, because it would only be to point myself out as Major Peters' murderer if I said anything. But you didn't want to fight for it if you could get it by promises. If I murdered Major Peters why didn't I, when caught, accept your offer and your help to escape?"

Mr. Walters from Manchester burst into a coarse guffaw.

"Bah!" he snorted contemptuously. "That sort of dust wouldn't stick in anybody's eyes! And the proof that there isn't a word of truth in what you say—that we wanted to get it for ourselves—is that when you drove us out with the revolver we ran at once for Tomlinson and all the rest here. Tell us instead how, if you didn't murder Major Peters, you came to have the book?"

Kenneth Wayne braced himself as though for a blow. What answer was there to make save the truth—and the truth would sound like the mouthing of a cornered fool. But there was no other answer.

"When I went back to my room," he said steadily, "I found the book on my table."

There was an instant's ominous silence. Mr. Walters from Manchester broke it.

"Oh, hell!" said Mr. Walters caustically.

Tomlinson stepped a little closer to Kenneth Wayne.

"That's what you said about the kit bag, I believe," he said sharply. "It's a bit thin, Wayne. It will hardly hold water. You might as well make a clean breast of it. Where is it now?"

"I don't know," Kenneth Wayne answered in the same steady tone.

"You don't know!" Tomlinson's voice was still more curt and sharp.

"No! I don't. During the fight in my room Fouché hit me over the head with a chair. I was groggy when I drove them out, and after they'd gone I went under myself for a bit, knocking the lamp over with me as I fell on the floor. When I came to again the book was gone."

"He's a liar!" shouted Mr. Walters savagely. "He's a liar on the face of it! There wasn't anything groggy about him, or you can bet your last bob he'd never have got us out of that room. That's only a yarn, and a rotten bad one,

to cover up the fact that he's hidden it somewhere. He's got it, right enough. He had to hide it. There was nothing else he——" Mr. Walters stopped abruptly.

There was a patter of feet along the verandah, a figure in white racing toward the little group of men, the grotesque, jerky bobbing up and down of a great turban, and then Gulab Singh's voice, hoarse, gasping for lack of breath.

"Sahibs! Sahibs!" he cried. "Look! Look down the road, sahibs! They come!"

There was a concerted rush to the verandah rail, a moment of strange, hushed silence over which from the distance there came a sudden outburst of yells and cries, and then a harsh, quick ejaculation from Tomlinson.

"My God, what's the meaning of this!" he cried out. "A native uprising?"

"No, sahib," Gulab Singh's voice answered. "But who can foresee the end? All night there has been much talk, and men's minds have been turned as though touched with fever. And still more has it been thus, sahib, since the Major Sahib has been killed. It is the book, sahib, the *Konchi-kan Kitab* of Kana-ee-a. But these who come are not men of the village here. They are strangers who have come in. Sahib, I have run fast to warn you. They have heard that Wayne Sahib has the book. It is the book they want, and——" His voice died away in a renewed uproar, nearer now, approaching from the road below.

Kenneth Wayne was leaning out over the verandah rail. For the moment no one seemed to be paying any attention to him. He stared down the road. In the moonlight he could make out a band of leaping, running figures—twenty or thirty of them, perhaps. They were coming on toward the hotel. They made hideous outcries; and they seemed to be brandishing weapons in the air, whether rifles or the native kris he could not tell—the light was too indistinct at that distance.

Gulab Singh's words were pounding through his brain: "These who come are not men of the village here." He wanted to question Gulab Singh, to ask him how he knew, to ask him what had incited this outbreak, to ask him how these men had come to know that the *Konchi-kan Kitab* had been in his, Kenneth Wayne's, possession to-night? But Gulab Singh had been crowded away from him, and four or five of the others now stood between.

It didn't matter! He knew the answers to those questions—perhaps better than Gulab Singh did! It was becoming clear enough now. This was Walters' and Fouché's work! This was what Walters had threatened; and this accounted for the non-appearance of Monsieur Nicholas Fouché. The two men had had to save their own faces in the eyes of their fellow whites, even while they called upon their native accomplice to play a part. They had run down the road, told their story to the first group of white men they had met, and Fouché had gone on to tell the others—but Fouché had gone further. Fouché had gone to find the man they had called Talamori—the man who had come to Salabam to-night in the darkness with three proas. He did not know who Talamori was, and he had been frustrated in his efforts to get even a look at the man, but that was undoubtedly Talamori out there coming along the road. Talamori would take by force what Mr. Walters from Manchester and Monsieur Nicholas Fouché had been unable to take, and, afterwards, being already engaged in some underhand business together, they would divide the spoils.

Kenneth Wayne's eyes became suddenly riveted on the leading figure on the road. As something quite outside of his own environment, in a subconscious way, he heard Tomlinson's voice:

"I don't like the looks of this! You chaps had better slip into your rooms and arm yourselves."

He heard a voice answer:

"Most of us are armed, I think. I know I took my revolver when I started out for Major Peters'."

Kenneth Wayne heard no more—was not even conscious of what was passing around him. That leading figure was coming nearer and nearer, and it was dressed in white and it wore a sash. He felt his hands grip the verandah rail until the muscles cracked. What *colour* was the sash? He couldn't see yet. The moonlight played tricks with colours, changed them, made them seem what they were not. Yes, he could see—now! It was like blood—like the colour of blood—like a band of blood around the waist. Somewhere, once—where was it?—he had said that before—used those words. The sash was crimson—crimson—*crimson*. And now the face! Eyes strained, he watched. Figures, yelling and screaming, were dancing up and down on the road just below him now; but there was one, just one, that, weaving itself in and out amongst the others, his eyes never left.

And then suddenly Kenneth Wayne drew back a little. He felt curiously weak, as though his strength had been sapped and drained away from him.

Great drops of sweat from his forehead were trickling into his eyes. He flirited them away with an uncertain movement of his hand. The figure in white stood full in the moonlight now, the face upturned. Talamori! Yes, of course, it was Talamori. It couldn't be any one else. But Talamori wasn't Crimson Sash.

He felt a sudden apathy, a let-down from high tension settle upon him. Everything else, if there was anything else, was insignificant since that was not Crimson Sash. Not very logical! He hadn't thought of Crimson Sash when he had stepped to the verandah rail—but for a moment, whether he were warranted or not, he had been so sure.

Everybody was intent upon the road below. Kenneth Wayne moved back across the verandah and leaned against the wall where, here, it made the corner of the building. And then slowly the sense of apathy and indifference to his surroundings left him. Some one, this Talamori obviously, was haranguing in the native tongue from the road. Words, their meaning and significance, began to filter through his brain. Talamori demanded the book. . . . It did not belong to the white men anyway, it belonged to the Malay people. . . . They knew that the man called Wayne had it. . . . Let the white men give up the book and they would go peaceably away again. . . . If the book was not given up it would be taken if every house was burned and every white man and woman killed to get it. . . .

A burst of demoniacal applause greeted the conclusion of the harangue.

Kenneth Wayne heard Gulab Singh translating to Tomlinson and the others.

And then Tomlinson's voice:

"They mean business, right enough. They're five or six to one against us, and once started this sort of thing will spread—every Malay on the island will be running amuck."

"Yes; right, you are!" agreed another voice quickly. "The only thing to do is make Wayne tell us where it is, and give it to them. A dozen books wouldn't pay for our lives, and that's what it means."

There was comparative quiet from the road—the Malays evidently waiting the reply to their ultimatum.

"Where is Wayne?" Tomlinson's voice demanded. "Oh, there you are!" He came toward Kenneth Wayne. "You understand what's going on here, don't you?" he said gruffly. "Those devils down there are threatening what

will practically mean a massacre here if they are not given the book. Where is it?"

Kenneth Wayne shook his head.

"I don't know," he said.

Tomlinson stared for an instant, his eyes full of anger and contempt.

"Damn it, you rotter," he flung out, "don't you understand that's the only chance you've got for *your* life, too?"

A flush, hot and burning, swept across Kenneth Wayne's cheeks. His hands clenched—and dropped again to his sides. His voice was husky as he spoke:

"I haven't got the book. I don't know where it is. I've told you that before."

Tomlinson swung on his heel.

"Tell them that, Gulab Singh," he called out; "that Wayne says he doesn't know where the book is."

A chorus of angry and threatening shouts answered Gulab Singh's compliance with this order.

Then Talamori cried back furiously from the road; and Kenneth Wayne's face grew set, and unconsciously he drew himself up to his full height as he listened.

"That is a lie!" the Malay shouted. "We know that it is a lie! If he will not tell, give him to us, and we will make him tell. Give us the man, or give us the book, and we will be satisfied."

Again Gulab Singh translated.

"Yes!" It was Mr. Walters in quick, eager approval. "Yes; that's the thing to do. Why should we have our throats cut for him? He's only a damned murderer anyway! I say, hand him over and let's do it quick before this thing gets out of hand."

Once more an ominous silence from both the verandah and the road below. Then Tomlinson's voice, strangely quiet:

"What he is and what he deserves is one thing; but to hand a white man over to the torture of savages is another. It isn't done, you know."

There was a gruff ripple of assent from the men lined along the verandah rail.

Again Tomlinson spoke.

“Watch them!” he cautioned in a low tone. “If they make a rush, you’ll have to fire.” He raised his voice. “Wayne,” he called, “are you going to let this thing go on? The blood of every man here is on your head—and there is a woman, too.”

Kenneth Wayne answered mechanically. He was not quite sure what his reply was except that in some form or other he reiterated what he had said before. He was obsessed only with a sense of crisis, imminent, upon him; and though he was aware that the Malay leader was haranguing from the road again, and now more angrily than ever, he no longer attempted to follow the man’s words. His mind and brain were feverishly at work.

The place would be a shambles. . . . What was it Old Man Wayne had said about knowing and fighting these devils of the *Orang-laut* for forty years? . . . *He* knew them, too. . . . God, he had had cause to know them, cause to know that there would be worse than murder here. . . . White men. . . . White men. . . . It had been rather decent of Tomlinson. . . . And there was Dorothy Merwood. . . . Himself, or the book. . . . But if they got him and he couldn’t tell where the book was they would still attack the hotel in an effort to find it. . . . Fouché and Walters had told them it was here. . . . That wasn’t any good. . . . Mr. Merwood couldn’t talk, and there wasn’t any time. . . . The blood of every one here on his head, that’s what Tomlinson had said . . . The book . . . The book . . .

He gave a sudden, inarticulate cry, too low to be heard. What was this thing that was formulating, germinating in his brain?

There *was* a book, a big book, the treatise on metallurgy that he had brought amongst others to give colour to his “mining” activities . . . It was almost the size of the *Konchi-kan Kitab* . . . The moonlight and a little distance would complete the illusion. . . . If they saw him with that . . . It was in one of the large bags he had left in his room when he had started off on his trip with Gulab Singh. . . .

Scarcely more than a few seconds had passed. He looked sharply around him. Of them all, Walters had been watching him most assiduously—but Mr. Walters, too, just for the moment, was occupied with the Malays on the road.

His room was only a few yards away along the side verandah here. He turned, and, on tiptoe, made swiftly toward it. It was the only chance—a bit

slim! But if he wasn't downed before he could make this Talamori think he had got away with the book, the rest didn't matter. His brain began to pound with a single phrase, over and over again: Hare and hounds. . . . Hare and hounds. . . .

Yes, that was it. If Walters had brought Talamori here, Walters would jump greedily at the bait. Walters had searched the room, but Walters' search had been very short and cursory because he had probably made up his mind before he began that the book hadn't been left there—also, the search had probably been made by match-light. Walters wouldn't question for an instant but that it *had* been hidden there all the time.

Kenneth Wayne glanced over his shoulder as he reached his doorway. He was in plain view, especially of Walters, but he hadn't been noticed yet. It was better than he had hoped for—it was the maximum lead he could expect.

He jumped through the doorway now and across the room. After an instant's groping he found the bag, opened it, and his hands closed on the volume he sought. A grim inward laugh possessed him, as, in a flash now, he recrossed the room, leaped through the doorway—and deliberately dropped the book on the verandah floor. It fell with a crash. It brought a quick, surprised yell in Mr. Walters' voice. And then, as Kenneth Wayne snatched up the book again, Mr. Walters from Manchester bawled out frantically at the top of his lungs:

"He's bolting with it! By God, he's got the book! There he goes! There he goes—along the verandah to the back!"

Kenneth Wayne was running at top speed. And again his brain was working feverishly—in snatches.

The White Bachelors weren't likely to fire . . . It was *their* way out if he got away, wasn't it? . . . And Walters couldn't fire unless he had got another revolver somewhere . . . The Malays would, though, and they'd come sweeping around the side of the hotel . . . He had to let them see him carrying the book . . . No good without that . . . But if he could get to the woods and hide this metallurgical volume under a rock . . . Ha, ha! . . . Metallurgical volume under a rock! . . . That was funny! . . . But if he could do that, get rid of it, hide it, so as to keep up the illusion, even if they winged him and got him afterwards . . . Talamori wouldn't have any more interest in the hotel, or those there . . . That was the game. . . .

Wild yells, shrieks and cries came from the direction of the road. There was the pounding of feet in pursuit along the verandah itself.

He reached the rear railing, swung himself over, and, as he had done once before that night, slid down one of the supporting posts to the ground. Here he headed across the clearing in the direction of the storehouse—it seemed to be the straightest line, the shortest distance to where the woods showed beyond—and yards were counting. He heard the Malays coming along the side of the hotel, heard a sudden, louder outburst of cries—and knew he had been seen. They couldn't be more than forty yards behind—but there was some one much nearer—some one who was firing at him now. The bullets were whining by his head.

He shot a backward glance over his shoulder. Not ten yards behind, far in advance of all the others, was a figure with a great turbaned head, and from this figure now came the flash of another revolver shot. Gulab Singh! Gulab Singh—the man who only a little while ago had been so speciously anxious for his welfare, anxious to aid him to escape! A surge of fury swept over him—and then in a sort of stunned amazement he was conscious of Gulab Singh's voice.

“To the right, sahib! To the right—the storehouse!” called Gulab Singh. “Run close to the end wall, sahib, then slip around and get inside. They are too close behind—you could not get far enough into the woods to escape. I will lead the chase, sahib, and they will think you are in the woods, but they will not find you. Quick now, sahib, and wait until I return. Now, sahib—*now!*”

Gulab Singh was firing again.

Kenneth Wayne obeyed mechanically. Gulab Singh! He might have known! Clever devil, Gulab Singh! There was hope for it now. He hadn't thought there was much before—not for himself—only to fool them with the book. He swerved suddenly around the end of the storehouse and gained the door on the far side. Out of the tail of his eye he saw a white figure running, firing, heading on in imaginary pursuit toward the woods—and then panting, gasping for his breath, Kenneth Wayne wrenched the door open, flung himself within, and closed the door behind him.

And past the storehouse he heard a screaming, shrieking mob surge onward.

—XIX—

THE OUTCASTS

THE shouts, the yells, the conglomerate sounds of pursuit, came from farther off now, from the edge of the woods—but Kenneth Wayne was no longer intent upon them. There was something much nearer at hand. He jerked his revolver from his pocket, and, still panting violently from his exertions, fought to quiet his heavy breathing. There was some one here inside the storehouse besides himself. He was sure of it. It wasn't imagination. It wasn't because he was overwrought or excited. He could have sworn he had heard a board in the flooring creak almost at the instant that he had closed the door behind him.

But there was no sound now, save the distant and constantly receding yells of the Malays. It was brutally dark. He could not see a yard in front of him. It must be one of the native boys attached to the hotel who had come in here for some purpose or other, and, terrified at the shots and cries, was trying to hide his presence now. Yes, that was probably it; and the boy had probably been after kerosene—there was an unusually strong smell of it about. This was the storehouse, of course. It obviously wasn't Mr. Walters from Manchester, and he was satisfied in his own mind that it wasn't Nicky Fouché. He wasn't going to stand here and be baited by a native boy.

"Who's there?" he demanded sharply.

From almost at his elbow there came a sudden laugh.

"Well, I'm damned if it isn't the prisoner still out for an airing," drawled a voice. "You, Wayne—eh?"

Glover! Glover, the beachcomber! It came as a shock of surprise, but in an instant Kenneth Wayne had recovered his composure. Glover! He found himself trying to decide just what this man's presence meant to him. It was evidently Gulab Singh's intention, once the chase had been led far enough afield, to come back here, and in that case, even if nothing happened in the meantime, Glover became a complication, an awkward complication—unless the man could be trusted—and he had good reasons for not being at

all sure as to what Glover would, or would not, do at any time irrespective of circumstances.

“Yes; it’s Wayne,” he said tersely.

“H’m!” said Glover. “Quite a pleasant little row going on! I take it that two and two make four. They found the cage empty, and, from the racket, I fancy the whole of Salabam is out to pot the bird. In view of the immediate circumstances and with an eye to the welfare of my own skin, I’m a bit interested. Are they going blind, or did they see you?”

“They saw me—very much so!” said Kenneth Wayne grimly.

“And you doubled on them and came in here. A rather inviting prospect! How long do you think it will be before they twig your game and come back to dig you out?”

Kenneth Wayne did not answer. He was still frankly at a loss just how to act toward the other. Glover was an enigma—and a bit of a rascal too, as far as he, Kenneth Wayne, had been able to make out.

“Look here!” said Glover abruptly, after a moment’s silence. “This won’t do at all! We’ve got to get down to some common basis of what’s-what. You’re obviously in a mess, and—I might as well admit it—you’re in a fair way toward getting me into one too. Deuced awkward, you butting in here!”

“Is it!” said Kenneth Wayne crisply. “Well, what are *you* doing here, anyway?”

“That’s a fair question,” returned Glover coolly; “but it doesn’t help the situation any, and so I don’t think I’ll answer it. For the moment we’re not far from being a pair of cornered rats—that’s the point at issue. What are we going to do about it?”

“You don’t seem to be as drunk as usual,” observed Kenneth Wayne irrelevantly. “I noticed that before—earlier to-night.”

“Frightfully observant of you!” drawled Glover. “What you mean is, of course—why? Suppose I say that my good friend Fouché has been inconsiderate enough to cut off my supply.”

“Did you expect to find any in Walters’ room?” inquired Kenneth Wayne instantly.

“We’re getting farther apart.” There was a sudden new and quiet note in Glover’s voice. “Major Peters has been murdered. Has that anything to do with you being here?”

Kenneth Wayne frowned a little in the darkness.

“You’ve rather a bit of nerve!” he said curtly. “However, as it is something that everybody else knows, I can’t see any harm in you knowing it too. I suppose in a way it’s got a whole lot to do with me being here, since Walters and Fouché saw me with The Locked Book in my room.”

“The Locked Book! Saw you with it!” ejaculated Glover. “Good God, you—” He checked himself sharply. “Where did you get it?”

“I found it in my room.” Kenneth Wayne flung out the reply brusquely, conscious that, since he did not expect it to be believed, he was irritated with himself for being led into making any reply at all—and especially, somehow or other, a reply to a man like Glover anyhow.

“Found it in your room?” The round, white ray of a flashlight cut suddenly through the blackness and played on Kenneth Wayne. “You don’t mind, do you?” said Glover quietly. “I’d like to see your face, and—” The light had become focused on the book under Kenneth Wayne’s arm. “The Locked Book!” Glover’s voice had taken on a note of uncertainty, a sort of amazed perplexity. “But that’s not The Locked Book!” The light came nearer. “That’s a book on—on metallurgy, according to the title.”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne briefly.

“What’s the answer?” Glover’s tones were quick, low, serious. “I’m not asking idly. There’s a hell of a lot at stake here, Wayne! For God’s sake open up, man! You look as though you had been in a fight.”

“I was,” said Kenneth Wayne. “With your friends Walters and Fouché.”

He felt his arm grasped tensely.

“Yes!” Glover breathed. “Go on—go on, Wayne!”

There was something in Glover’s voice and actions, despite the fact that the little he knew about the man had only given rise to one suspicion after another, that inspired Kenneth Wayne now with a sense of the other’s deadly earnestness. Well, why not tell him! If the Malays came back to the storehouse, if any stragglers for instance stumbled in here, Glover was likewise trapped, for he, Kenneth Wayne, was not going to give the man a chance to turn informant by letting him get out now, or any time, before he himself did.

“I drove them out of the room,” said Kenneth Wayne; “but I’d got a bit hurt in doing it. I suppose I fainted. When I came to the book was gone again.”

“You mean they came back and got it?”

“No,” said Kenneth Wayne. “They didn’t come back—and they didn’t get it.”

“How do you know they didn’t—if you had fainted?” Glover demanded bluntly.

“Because,” said Kenneth Wayne, and laughed shortly, “they went for a native named Talamori who had landed in here to-night, and who, I fancy, *you* know quite a bit about. They turned him loose on the hotel. That’s what all the row’s about. They thought, of course, I still had the book. Talamori threatened to attack the hotel unless the book were given to him. I couldn’t produce it, but that didn’t satisfy him. He demanded that I be turned over to his tender mercies in order to freshen up my memory a bit. Tomlinson was rather decent about it—couldn’t stomach a white man, even a suspected murderer, being thrown to the dogs. I—well, I had the good luck to remember this book I’ve got here—about the right size, you know, and nothing but moonlight to give it away; and I had the good luck to win out—so far. And I might add that Mr. Walters and Talamori are quite sure I’ve still got The Locked Book with me somewhere out there in the woods.”

For a moment Glover did not answer—save to whistle low under his breath. Then Kenneth Wayne felt a hand clapped impulsively on his shoulder, and Glover spoke.

“Wayne,” said Glover gruffly, “I don’t know anything about that dirty business at the Cheruchuk, or the old major’s killing to-night—but, by God, I know a man! I may be compounding a felony”—he chuckled grimly—“but I’ll take a chance on you.”

“*You’ll* take a chance!” Kenneth Wayne laughed a little harshly. “That’s rather good of you! On the basis of birds of a feather, I suppose? I happen to know you are mixed up in some shady affair here with Walters and Fouché, though you appear to be on your own in it, and trying to double-cross them.”

“I am,” said Glover coolly. “Come here!”

The electric torch in Glover’s hand flung out its ray again—and fell on the huge cases strewn about the place, the cluttered bolts of cloth upon the floor that Kenneth Wayne, though under quite different circumstances, had already seen once before that night.

Glover led the way to the largest case of all.

Mechanically Kenneth Wayne followed. He noticed that the covers of all the cases had been removed.

Glover directed the ray of light into the interior of the case beside which he had halted.

“Do you recognise the contents?” he inquired grimly.

Kenneth Wayne looked in. The object in the case required no label to establish its identity; but the case itself was saturated with kerosene, and the reek of it assailed his nostrils.

“It’s a machine gun—or part of one!” he ejaculated.

“Yes,” said Glover, “and there’s another in that case over there, and the rest are full of rifles—”

“Gun-running!” interjected Kenneth Wayne, his lips tightening a little.

“Exactly!” said Glover. “Gun-running to the piratical scum of the Archipelago—to help murder a few more whites! And part of the German disarmament, too! There was an amazing amount of this sort of stuff that became mysteriously non-existent after the war, and that the allies didn’t get. Here’s some of it.”

Kenneth Wayne stared again into the case.

“But it didn’t come packed in kerosene, did it?” he inquired with a grim smile.

Glover sent the flashlight’s ray along the length of the storehouse. It held on a barrel that stood against the end wall.

“No; that was Fouché’s hotel supply,” he said calmly. “I’ve been busy for the last half hour soaking the inside of these cases with it. I was just going to touch the fireworks off when that row broke out.”

Kenneth Wayne stared.

“Look here,” he said sharply, “who the devil are you, anyway?”

Glover laughed quietly.

“Well,” he said, “during the war I was an intelligence officer in Paris a good bit of the time. That’s where I met the delectable Monsieur Fouché—and since then I’ve had the honour to serve the British Government in much the same capacity.”

Kenneth Wayne said nothing. The flashlight was switched off again, and he was conscious that he was staring a little helplessly and foolishly at the other through the darkness; conscious, too, that distant sounds from the woods still came faintly to his ears, that in the immediate neighbourhood of the storehouse there was utter silence—but his mind seemed to be in a sudden whirl as though striving to adjust itself to some new and wholly amazing situation. Dimly he began to see, as one sees the first steps in the deciphering of a cryptogram when the elusive key comes suddenly into one's possession. Quite uninvited, quite unexplainably, the refrain of Glover's ubiquitous and ribald song began to run through his brain:

“An’ when I die,
Don’t bury me at all,
Just pickle . . .”

“Now,” said Glover abruptly, “you can see a little more clearly, can’t you, what I meant by saying I’d take a chance on you, Wayne? This stuff has got to be destroyed, and destroyed at once—that’s imperative. I fancy that, as it is, they nearly got the better of me, but this was the first chance I’d had. There’s no other way to prevent its delivery—no authority here strong enough to do anything but start trouble which would probably only result in all of the whites being wiped out. There are two or three oil-soaked bolts of cloth around every case, and a match or two will do the trick; besides, the place itself will burn like tinder. We’ll carry on now and touch it off before they tumble to the fact that you must have doubled on them. They’re bound to search this place when they come back—and they seem to be far enough away now to give us a fair chance to run for it.”

Kenneth Wayne smiled a little whimsically. His brain was quite normally cool, logically active again.

“Us?” he said. “A British intelligence officer and a suspected murderer make a rather strange and unusual partnership, don’t they?”

“Maybe,” said Glover with a short laugh, “but with a community of interest based on saving our lives, if we can, it’s strong enough, I fancy; for once I set this stuff afire, and with Talamori amuck, and Walters and Fouché behind him, I become as much an outcast and a menace to our fellow-whites as you are, if I stick around and they are faced with having to protect me. But that apart, from what experience I’ve had with murderers a man who would do what you have just done is about as much a murderer as I am. That’s the way I feel about it. Besides, to put it bluntly, you saved my life the other night—and you know it. I’ve got to keep under cover for the sake

of everybody until Talamori goes away from here again with his crew, and we'll stick the rest of this out together if you say the word—pal it together.”

“You mean that?” demanded Kenneth Wayne hoarsely.

He found a hand-clasp in the darkness.

“To the last hurdle, old top!” said Glover earnestly. “And now, first of all, you see that this stuff’s got to go—don’t you?”

“Yes, I see it!” Kenneth Wayne shot the words out from between suddenly tightened lips. Before him rose the scene of a ship’s foredeck—the piratical scum of the Archipelago, Glover had said—the murder of more whites—this was the way Old Man Wayne had been murdered. “I’ll help you burn it”—he laughed in a low, grim way—“you need have no doubt on that score!”

“I thought not!” said Glover, tersely. “Well, then, we’ll get at it—and then run for it at once.”

But now Kenneth Wayne shook his head slowly.

“Run where?” he asked quietly.

“God knows!” Glover answered bluntly. “To some other part of the woods, if we can make it. We’re better off in the open anyway, than to have them come running back and trap us here. As I say, they’re bound to tumble to the fact that you’ve doubled on them.”

“No; they’re not.” Kenneth Wayne’s voice was deliberate, still quiet. “And they won’t come back. They’ll search the whole island before they do that.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Glover quickly. “I don’t understand.”

“This,” said Kenneth Wayne—and in a few words he described his race across the clearing from the hotel, and the ruse employed by Gulab Singh.

“And Gulab Singh’s coming back here, you say?” said Glover, as Kenneth Wayne finished.

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne.

“H’m!” said Glover gruffly. “How do you know you can trust him?”

“I think I’d trust any man who had saved my life and risked his own in doing it,” replied Kenneth Wayne with a faint smile.

“Yes, that’s all right,” returned Glover. “You saved mine. But that’s a different matter entirely. How do you know Gulab Singh was disinterested? How do you know it wasn’t the book, and not you, he was trying to save; and that what he did was all a game, a risky one if you like, but a game just the same to get you and the book away—where he could get the book for himself?”

Kenneth Wayne did not answer for a moment.

“I hadn’t thought of that,” he said at last; “but I’m quite sure it isn’t so. He tried before to help me escape when the book wasn’t in question at all. Anyway, there’s this about it: They’ll search the island for days, and there isn’t a native in the place that will need any pressing to join the hunt with that book as the lure. It seems to have crazed them. And every individual one of them, apart perhaps from Talamori’s crowd, will be hoping he can get it for himself—do me in, you understand, and reap the reward unknown to his fellows. What chance have we got without help or food? If it’s a case of two evils at all, which I refuse to believe, one man in the person of Gulab Singh is certainly the lesser of the two.”

“Right!” agreed Glover after an instant’s hesitation. “We’ll wait, then; but just the same we’ll keep an eye on him, even if”—he began to chuckle suddenly—“he is a bit innocuous as a nurse!”

Kenneth Wayne leaned back against the packing case beside him.

“Speaking of that,” he said, “perhaps you wouldn’t mind telling me now a little about that night?”

“Not in the least!” said Glover heartily. “There’s no further reason for concealment. I’ve got Walters and Fouché dead to rights now, and, though I’ve got to lay low and can’t touch them while Talamori’s crowd is at their backs, my work here is finished when this stuff is destroyed, except to see that when those two precious birds leave Salabam they leave it with a pair of handcuffs on their wrists. And, besides, you’re entitled to know, for I haven’t forgotten that if it hadn’t been for you they would have put another shot into me that night and finished me.”

“Oh,” observed Kenneth Wayne. “So you know who it was that fired at you, after all!”

“Yes, rather!” said Glover dryly. “I think I said, didn’t I, that I knew Fouché—in Paris? He had a nice record there, but he was clever enough to keep the police from bringing anything home to him in a definite enough way to put him behind the bars, though their fingers itched to get him. I

fancy it finally must have got too hot for him and he had to get out, since he's here. I can't say as to that, however, for I had lost track of the man until a few months ago." Glover laughed suddenly again under his breath. "We were very chummy in Paris, Fouché and I—that's how we came to be chummy here when I first landed. Monsieur Nicholas Fouché was very anxious to keep my mouth shut about ancient indiscretions. He was really very generous with his liquor until he began to be a little afraid that I was going to prove an incubus on his hands—when these cases showed up."

Glover paused abruptly.

"They seem to be a long way off in the woods now," he said after a moment's silence. "I can scarcely hear them. Where the devil's this Gulab Singh?"

Kenneth Wayne, aware for the first time that he was still clinging tenaciously to the somewhat ponderous volume on metallurgy, laid it down on the floor.

"He hasn't got it all his own way," he said. "He's got to give them the slip without raising any suspicion before he can come back. There's nothing to do but sit tight. What do you mean about being chummy with Fouché in Paris?"

"Oh, that!" said Glover. "Nothing mysterious about it. I was, as I said, an intelligence officer and stationed a good bit in Paris during the war. Paris was full of draft evaders, deserters, spies and rotters generally. I was one of them, you understand—played three-quarters drunk most of the time, just as I've done here. Fouché ran a sink-hole, a rat's nest; harboured the above class—and sold the beggars out to the authorities when their money was gone and he could do it with safety to himself. That's one thing that enabled him to keep his face with the police." Again Glover chuckled. "I was arrested there one night myself as a deserter! But that was only a small part of monsieur's activities. He had another place especially devoted to the Tommies on leave—a café with doctored drinks, and a highly trained and seductive staff of female pickpockets. They never got that home on Fouché either. If the victim complained, the girl ducked and the Tommy went back to the trenches with empty pockets. Fouché simply wrung his hands and was desolated that such a thing should have happened. But all girls of that class were thieves. What could he do? He's a rare bird, is Monsieur Nicholas Fouché!"

"And Walters?" asked Kenneth Wayne, as Glover paused again. "Mr. Walters from Manchester? He's a German, isn't he?"

“Yes—originally. And that accounts a lot for these German guns here. But I haven’t got his record in anything like the same detail I have Fouché’s—yet. I had to go warily. He’s no fool. And it wasn’t until to-night when I saw things coming to a head that I—but I fancy you know now quite well what I did.”

“Searched his room,” said Kenneth Wayne, and in the darkness smiled a little self-deridingly. He had been woefully astray in his estimate of Glover the beachcomber!

“Yes,” said Glover. “I already knew he was German born and a naturalised British subject. I found that out in Singapore about six months ago. But that was all I knew about him personally. He was being ‘looked up’ when I started for Salabam after Fouché. Fouché was all I needed to go on. It’s quite all right, however. I ran across a code to-night in Walters’ room that our people will get to the bottom of quick enough; and several European addresses—like the old-time German spy stuff—that I fancy will throw a bombshell into the headquarters over there of this gun-running business and end it at last for good and all. I’ll admit they’ve given us a chase though. This little lot here is merely a flea bite, but it’s the first time we’ve actually caught the goods in transit. India had been getting out of hand a bit, and we discovered that in certain parts the natives were amazingly well armed—with German war rifles. It looked bad; and it wasn’t only India. Reports began to come in from all over the lot, especially from down in this section of the world—I’m speaking of British possessions, you understand?—that the natives were getting a lot of arms from somewhere. It was becoming extremely serious and widespread—first here, then there. Well, in a general way, that’s the story. And then I heard that a Frenchman named Nicholas Fouché had taken over a hotel in Salabam—*where there couldn’t possibly be any hotel business*—and I was thrown off here as a penniless, destitute and unregenerate stowaway a little more than a month ago. The idea was eventually, I imagine, if it worked out, to make a sort of storage-supply and general distributing point here.”

“I see,” said Kenneth Wayne. “And was Walters here when you came?”

“Yes,” said Glover, “but nothing happened until the day you put in and these cases were unloaded; that is, nothing except a number of visits made by this Talamori to Walters and Fouché, on one of which, by lying doggo, I discovered that the reason for the frequent conferences was that a lot of haggling was going on because some one that Talamori was acting for wasn’t satisfied with the price of what Walters called the ‘cloth’ he was selling. Then, as I say, the cases arrived, and I wanted to get a look at them.

They caught me at it that afternoon before I could get a peek inside any one of them—that is, they caught me in here. I pretended I was only sleeping off a drunk—and they pretended to believe me. And then they got me rather neatly—or would have, if it hadn't been for you. I know now that they must have found out in some way that I knew of, and had been watching, their meetings with Talamori. By the aid of a native, they planted a fake meeting with Talamori in the woods that evening—and I fell for it. You know what happened. I had to get away from the nurse you'd installed—Gulab Singh. I had to get the proof of what I was morally certain was in these cases. I slipped out of the Kling village and came back here—only to be bilked! I found Walters and Fouché both camped out here. The next day one or the other of them was always in the storehouse. Last night both of them slept here again. To-day it was the same thing. And then to-night Talamori came and brought his crowd intending to carry the arms away; but between the excitement over that book of yours and Major Peters' murder, the whole of them, Walters, Fouché, Talamori, gave me the first chance I'd had to do anything in here alone—and that brings us up to date.”

Kenneth Wayne said nothing. He was conscious of a certain disappointment. Glover had made clear a great deal—about Glover. But it had not helped in any way toward clearing up the mystery of the night before at the Cheruchuk River, or thrown light upon what had happened later pertaining to The Locked Book. He had hoped it would. Glover had simply eliminated himself as a possible source of information.

Glover spoke again.

“I hope we're not making fools of ourselves,” he said seriously. “We would have had time to have got a long way from here by now.”

“It's the same answer,” Kenneth Wayne replied. “There's less risk in waiting than in going. There's almost no chance at all that they'll come back here. It's the last spot they'll search. It isn't as though we knew of any place to go—we'll be no worse off even if we have to run blindly for it at the last.”

“Oh, well,” said Glover, “all right! Are you armed?”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne.

“Good!” said Glover. “That's something, anyway!”

A silence fell in the storehouse. From the woods there was no longer any sound at all. The minutes passed—draggingly, exaggerating their own length seemingly a hundredfold. The silence became heavy, palpitating—an

obsession. Kenneth Wayne began to grow restless, and, with restlessness, to become anxious. Unless something had happened to Gulab Singh, the man would come. He was sure of it, and yet——

He felt Glover's hand suddenly touch his arm.

There was a faint scratching sound at the door. It was repeated.

Both men stepped forward together in that direction.

"Who's there?" demanded Kenneth Wayne in a low tone.

"Sahib," a voice answered instantly from without, "it is Gulab Singh. The way is clear, sahib, to a place that I know of; but let the sahib come quickly."

"Wait a minute," whispered Glover in Kenneth Wayne's ear. "You may be sure of him, but I still can't say that I am altogether. Remember, keep your eye on him anyway. We'll have to explain to him what we are going to do."

Kenneth Wayne nodded, as he opened the door and bade Gulab Singh enter.

"Glover Sahib is here, Gulab Singh," he said; "and he is going with us."

Gulab Singh's tall figure, motionless, stood outlined murkily now just inside the open doorway.

"It is as the sahib wills," said Gulab Singh unemotionally.

"Good!" said Kenneth Wayne quietly. "Listen, then, Gulab Singh! Glover Sahib says—and he is right—that before we go we must set this place on fire."

"On fire?" Gulab Singh's voice was neither raised nor lowered.

It was Glover who answered now.

"Yes," he said quickly. He sent the flashlight sweeping over three or four of the packing cases, then switched it off again. "These cases are full of arms—rifles, guns, machine guns, you understand?—and it was for these that Talamori came to-night. He must not get them."

"Even so, sahib," said Gulab Singh gravely. "It is well. And it can be done if it is done quickly, for the flames will not begin to show until we have reached a good distance in the woods. But it is even a greater matter that Talamori should not get the book that Wayne Sahib brought here, for it is in

my mind that if it were found it would bring great evil upon those at the hotel. Let the book, too, be burned, sahib.”

Kenneth Wayne stared in a puzzled, uncertain way at the dimly outlined figure of the East Indian. He heard a sudden, smothered ejaculation from Glover; and then Glover’s voice came prodding quickly, craftily.

“What!” exclaimed Glover sharply. “Burn that! Burn a fortune! Destroy The Locked Book! Are you mad?”

“Sahib,” said Gulab Singh in the same grave tone, “I did not speak of the *Konchi-kan Kitab*, but of the book that Wayne Sahib carried from the hotel. The book with which Wayne Sahib saved the Miss Sahib and the sahibs at the hotel was not the *Konchi-kan Kitab*.”

“How do you know?” demanded Glover.

“Sahib,” replied Gulab Singh, “I have eyes. When I ran close to Wayne Sahib in the chase from the hotel, I saw that it was not the book with the dragon cover.”

“You are right, Gulab Singh!” Kenneth Wayne’s voice was curiously gruff. “And it shall be left here to burn. Well, Glover?”

“I’m stumped, Wayne,” said Glover heartily; “bowled clean—middle wicket. Have you got matches?”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne.

“Then start two or three of those bolts going,” said Glover coolly. “Quick now!”

There was a scuffle of swiftly moving feet, spurts of match-lights coming out of the darkness, and then a little ripple of flame from half a dozen different points up and down the length of the storehouse as the bolts of oil-saturated cloth began to catch fire.

Kenneth Wayne, from the floor, picked up the volume on metallurgy, and, still further to assure its destruction, pitched it into one of the cases. The next instant he had joined Glover and Gulab Singh at the door.

“The woods to the right, sahibs—follow me,” whispered Gulab Singh.

Running, they gained the woods at the right-hand edge of the clearing—and still ran on without pause, but stumbling now, groping their way, plunging on through the thick and obstructing undergrowth.

Kenneth Wayne was breathing heavily as, after what he judged to be perhaps five minutes, Gulab Singh halted suddenly.

“Sahibs,” said Gulab Singh, “we are far enough now to be out of the way of those who will come back because of the fire. And now we must go with great quiet and take no more risk of noise. But still we must go quickly, for the place where the sahibs must hide is a long way off. And see, sahibs, there is the fire!”

Kenneth Wayne turned his head. The sky behind him over the tree-tops seemed suddenly to burst into lurid light.

And then, as of one accord, the three men went on again, still swiftly, but with almost uncanny silence now, twisting, turning, weaving in and out amongst the trees; went on and on like men, it seemed at last, who strove futilely but always in strange haste to reach some elusive goal—and an hour passed, and still the great bobbing turban, looming faintly white ahead, led steadily onward.

Once Glover spoke—a little querulously—almost inaudibly, as though to himself:

“Where’s he taking us, anyway?”

And out of the darkness, instantly, Gulab Singh’s voice floated back:

“Sahib, among my people the place is called The Devil’s Throat.”

—XX—

THE DEVIL'S THROAT

KENNETH WAYNE shifted his position a little. His quarters were none too comfortable! The shelf of rock upon which he lay, besides being extremely narrow, was wet and precariously slimy; while almost at his elbow, and almost on a level with his outstretched body, a great stream of water rushed by with the force of a mill-race. Overhead the damp and dripping walls made an arch of solid rock. Here, at the mouth of what, with the ages, or by earthquake, or volcanic disturbance, had become a subterranean channel, like a hole bored through the base of the hillside, the morning sunlight filtered in for a few yards—and became engulfed in a blackness so utter and profound as to give the impression that its further progress had been suddenly barred by an impenetrable wall.

It was a strange place, this Devil's Throat! He had been here two days, and he had not yet overcome a sort of incredulous amazement at all about him. He lay now in the very orifice of the "Throat" itself. A yard in front of him, out in the broad sunlight, was a wide platform-like ledge of rock—and then the eye caught next, thirty or forty feet below, a glade of tropical magnificence, a little amphitheatre built with all of nature's art and craft, whose walls were foliage with tree-tops traced in exquisite design against the skyline, and whose floor was a great pool of clearest water in which the passing, fluffy clouds, seeming to stay their vagrant wanderings, appeared to preen themselves as in a mirror. And the water that rushed past at his side, a stream that was a good twenty feet in width, but how deep he did not know, swept along as though in a frenzy to obtain its freedom and, eager to disgorge itself, plunged downward in a cataract to the pool below where, he knew, though he could not see it now from where he lay, it broke into creamy foam and iridescent spray, and from it a mist floated upwards that fancy might have likened to thin, rolling clouds of steam.

His eyes fixed on the far end of the glade where the pool narrowed into a ribbon of water and the river passed on out of sight. He was on guard, the outpost of the little camp that was near the opening of the subterranean passage on the other side of the hill. It was not so alluring there; nature had

not been so generous. There, the river swept around the base of a series of rugged hills in a gorge of high, precipitous walls, and for the most part the country, by comparison, was barren, ugly, lifeless to the eye. But the camp was there, rather than here, because the river, which was the same one that ran past the Kling village near the town, formed, as it were, a natural pathway up from the coast, and invited almost an inevitable search of this spot; and also because the glade here made a sort of natural defence for the other side, for, except by the subterranean river passage, or by a long circuit around through the valley to the left of the hillside, further progress was here arrested, unless one attempted the difficult and forbidding task of scaling the hillside itself.

He nodded to himself. Gulab Singh had chosen well. The Devil's Throat was not in itself a hiding place, but it possessed, unless under extraordinary conditions, a means of escape in case of discovery or attack. The subterranean river passage was not in any sense a habitable cave; it was not even passable in high water. At the present time, however, with care, one could make one's way through—a distance, as nearly as he could judge on account of the river's many twists and turns, of some five hundred yards—and so, unless attacked from both sides at once, escape from one end of the passage through to the other, and thereafter a good start toward another hiding place, was always possible. In fact, almost that very situation had arisen yesterday, except that, not being actually discovered, he and his companions had been able to return here when a band of Malays, who for an hour had swarmed about the glade, had gone away again.

Two nights and two days of it now—not counting the night when they followed Gulab Singh through the woods until almost the breaking of the dawn! Not that this place was so far away from the town; it wasn't. According to Gulab Singh it was scarcely more than an hour's journey; but that night, to avoid the natives who were searching through the intervening woods, they had been obliged to make a great detour of many miles, so many that at the end, he remembered, he had flung himself down, heedless of where he lay, in utter weariness.

Outstretched, his elbows on the rock, his chin in his hands, he stared down into the glade, keeping watch on the farther end where the last sparkle of the river was lost in the converging forest. But his mood was not in consonance with his physical inactivity. He was disturbed, anxious, goaded by a sense of impotence, harassed by that old feeling, become all too familiar now, that Fate was juggling with him, laughing at him, making mockery of all the plans he had so carefully laid, deriding as a ludicrous

effort what he had striven to do—and challenging him at every turn, as it were, to show cause to the contrary!

Nor was this mood upon him now because of any degree of physical distress or hardship. Gulab Singh had not stopped at being merely a guide—he had provided every necessity. Selim Ali, one of Gulab Singh's fellow-villagers, who spoke a little English, had joined the party, and each night made an excursion to the village and returned with a basket of food. There was even an abundance of cigarettes for Glover and himself.

At the thought of cigarettes, Kenneth Wayne reached into his pocket, secured one and lighted it. He inhaled it deeply. It wasn't in any sense his immediate surroundings; it was the when and the where and the how all this was to end. It was as though, with scarcely a choice of moves, he were struggling against an apparently inevitable checkmate. Suppose this search for him and for The Locked Book died down, and Talamori went away and

The Locked Book! His thoughts were suddenly off at a tangent. Where had Mr. Merwood hidden it? Where had the man put it? How had he managed to dispose of it? The old scientist hadn't said anything, hadn't been able to—at least up to last night. Gulab Singh, in the rôle of one of those who, too, searched for him, Kenneth Wayne, had gone each day to the town and had moved freely about, both for the purpose of obtaining information and as a sort of *prima facie* evidence that he was innocent of guile, and Gulab Singh had said last night that Merwood Sahib was very sick, and that the Miss Sahib said her father had not regained full consciousness since that other night.

Again Kenneth Wayne's thoughts were wayward. There had been no other news of Dorothy Merwood—no message. Of course not! How could there be? Gulab Singh, playing his rôle, had very wisely confided in no one—not even the Miss Sahib. His reports had been of a far different nature: more natives flocking into Salabam, more searchers scouring the island, an epidemic of hysterical excitement, and always, everywhere, on every tongue, the *Konchi-kan Kitab* of Kana-ee-a.

Kenneth Wayne's lips drew together. The Miss Sahib! In one sense, perhaps, it was as well that Mr. Merwood had been unable to attempt any explanation. It might not have been a good one! As it was, Talamori counted the book to be in his, Kenneth Wayne's, sole possession and there was no trouble in Salabam. But Dorothy Merwood! Her father's condition made it a bitterly hard situation for her. Suppose something happened to her father?

Her present anxiety, alone, amongst strangers, facing that possibility! Her grief afterwards! And he could do nothing for her—nothing!

Would she want him to?

He flung the cigarette away, watched it swirl for an instant—and then shoot, a puny thing in the might of the current, out over the edge of the fall and disappear.

He laughed suddenly, harshly, as he cupped his chin in his hands again. He was like that—just as puny as that bit of cigarette, and the fates against which he strove just as remorseless as the current. That brought him back again to the when and the where and the how all this was to end. As long as Talamori remained he, Kenneth Wayne, could not return to the town, for he then became at once a menace to his fellow-whites again. And even if Talamori were gone, he was not so sure but the natives of the place, augmented by new arrivals, the excitement amongst them constantly on the increase, as Gulab Singh reported, would make it equally dangerous for the white residents if he showed himself there. But even suppose all that were cleared away—what then? He went back only to face a charge of murder—two murders. What hideous irony—when he had set out to find Crimson Sash!

Crimson Sash! Crimson Sash! Crimson Sash! The name began to throb at his brain. How the man would laugh if he only knew! The Nemesis that set out upon his trail itself bound, fettered, gagged—and charged with murder! He wouldn't hunt for Crimson Sash any more—he would be sent away to trial. The thing was monstrous! It was unbelievable!

His hands clenched over his jowls. No, it wasn't at an end; it never would be! God, that night on the *Waratan! Murder! Aye*, there had been murder! There had been a white face upturned on the foredeck ladder—the face of Old Man Wayne. And a fiend out of the pit of hell had done it! It wasn't at an end! Unless they hanged him, he would come back. Not here perhaps . . . somewhere else . . . Salabam was the last place now . . . but somewhere in the islands . . . somehow . . . if it took years . . . if he were an old man at the end . . . older than Old Man Wayne had been—at the end . . . he and Crimson Sash would stand face to face.

Unless meanwhile he were hanged!

Yes—unless meanwhile he were hanged! His laugh, low, harsh, jangling, rang out again. And then slowly his hands unclenched, releasing the folds of

flesh that, angry with the imprisonment they had endured, burned in blotched, red ridges on either cheek.

He forced his mind into calmer channels. Presently, Glover, or Selim Ali, or Gulab Singh would come along through the passage from the camp to relieve him, and later on Gulab Singh would make his way into the town. Perhaps by nightfall there would be more news. News! He shook his head. He was just wheedling his mind into a state of composure. The news wouldn't be any different than that of the day before, would it? Just a sort of standstill in the town, a sort of deathly hush, hardly a native in sight save the women and the children—the men away, scouring the island, scouring it everywhere—as though—well, as though there were a gold-rush on! He smiled whimsically. 'Forty-nine had turned men of his own race and colour mad—gold mad. It had crazed men. The lure of old Kana-ee-a's fabulous wealth would probably have crazed some of them too, let alone a murdering and rapacious lot like the *Orang-laut*, that for generations had made piracy and theft and greed both their worship and their craft. There was nothing strange in what was happening here. Indeed, far from being strange, it was only the expected, the logical effect from cause, the working out of the only law they knew, where, in the last analysis, each individual was a law unto himself. It was only a wonder that, as they spread out over the island in their search, more had not come here to this spot—more would come undoubtedly, in spite of those who had gone away empty-handed yesterday. That was why he watched. There was comparatively little danger at night, the blackness and the thick woods did not promise well for searchers; but in the daylight, even if it were only a single straggler——

Kenneth Wayne became suddenly tense, alert. There was one now! At least, he thought it was. He thought he had caught sight of something white, something that moved, far down there at the end of the glade. But it was gone now. No—there it was again! There was a figure coming through the trees—in white—a white *sarong*, wasn't it? It was just on the river bank now—coming toward the pool.

For a moment he watched, a strained expression in his face and eyes; at first in incredulity, and then in wondering amazement—and then his blood seemed to rush through his veins as though afire, and there was a fierce and sudden pounding of his heart. He sprang to his feet, gained the ledge of rock outside, and began to scramble downward in mad haste over the rough, and even perilous descent beside the waterfall.

It wasn't a native! It wasn't even a man! It was a woman—a white woman, with fluttering skirt, who seemed to run a little unsteadily—to

stumble and recover herself and come on again. And he could see her face in the sunlight now. Dorothy Merwood . . . Dorothy . . . Dorothy . . .

She saw him, cried out to him, came on running toward him.

And midway in the glade they met.

“Dorothy! You here!” Her name came spontaneously to his lips. She did not seem to notice it.

“Oh, I thought—I thought I would never come to the waterfall,” she answered, and her voice broke a little. “I thought I would never, never come to it—and then I was afraid that even if I did I wouldn’t be able to find you.” An hysterical little laugh came suddenly into her voice. “Where did you come from? You seemed to appear from nowhere—out—out of the waterfall itself.”

She was trembling, obviously near the limit of her endurance.

Kenneth Wayne took her arm to support her. There was a queer twitching of his lips. Her blouse was torn across the shoulder, and the flesh was red with great ugly scratches; her feet and ankles were wet; her skirt soggy, with a huge rent in it. A yearning came—one that fought fiercely against denial—to draw her close to him, and hold her there, and quiet and soothe her.

“And so I did.” He found his own voice unsteady, and tried to quiet it—how else could he quiet her? “See!” He pointed up the heavily wooded face of the hillside to where, some forty feet above them, the river gushed from the orifice. “There’s a passage through there when the river is as low as it is now.”

She was trying to arrange her disordered hair, and, in her effort, from nervous fingers a great golden mass of it cascaded down her back.

“Oh!” she cried out, her face crimson.

“Please don’t mind that—please don’t,” Kenneth Wayne pleaded gravely. “Tell me what has happened. What is it?”

“It’s Walters—and Fouché,” she answered quickly. “They’re coming.”

Instinctively Kenneth Wayne glanced around behind him.

“They’ve dared—Walters has dared again!” he said hoarsely.

“No, no! Not that!” she said hurriedly. “They don’t know I’m here. It’s you!”

“But how did they know!” he exclaimed. “How did you know? How——” He checked himself sharply. “Where are they? Close behind?”

She shook her head.

“I don’t know!” She smiled a little wanly. “They may be. They may be here any minute, and they may not be here for hours.”

“I see!” Kenneth Wayne’s voice was composed, cool, reassuring now. “Well, we’ll get under cover in any case. Shall we?” He began to lead her quietly along. “It’s a bit of a stiff climb up there, but I’ll help you. Do you feel up to telling me all about it now, or shall we wait until we’ve——”

“No, I—I’m quite all right,” she interrupted. “And, besides, there isn’t very much to tell, though I don’t understand it at all, because Walters and Fouché must have had something to do with that Malay brute they call Talamori—and that seems impossible.”

Kenneth Wayne laughed shortly.

“Far from being impossible, it happens to be a fact,” he said. “I can explain that—and will later. Go on, please.”

She glanced up at him quickly in a puzzled way, then shook her head a little helplessly.

“That seems almost as impossible, too,” she said. “I—I am afraid I don’t understand anything except—except that the whole world seems to have gone wrong, and—and one doesn’t laugh any more.”

“Don’t! For God’s sake, don’t say that!” he begged anxiously. “Things are bound to come out—somehow. Just think about what you were telling me.”

She turned her head away for an instant to hide, he was certain, sudden tears.

“Yes,” she said. “Well, early this morning, I went downstairs to get something for father—it was hardly daylight. And I heard Mr. Walters and Fouché talking just inside the bar. They did not think any one was up, of course, and they probably weren’t as cautious as they might have been. I—I heard your name, and I listened. Fouché was telling Mr. Walters that he had been down to see Talamori—I don’t know where that would be—and that somebody else had come. Somebody, as nearly as I could make out, that seemed to be in authority over Talamori, and that while they were talking, I suppose through an interpreter, a native came in in great excitement. Fouché told Walters he did not understand much of what was said, but he caught

enough to make sure you were up the river where there was a waterfall. Then Fouché said that Talamori and the other man asked him if he had understood, and he said no. And then the two talked together once more in Malay, and Fouché caught enough again to understand that they would wait until to-night when it was dark to come after you.”

Dorothy Merwood paused. Her breath was coming heavily. She stumbled a little as she walked.

“I think I can guess the rest,” said Kenneth Wayne grimly. “Mr. Walters and Monsieur Fouché believe in the old adage of the early bird getting the worm. Is that it?”

“Yes,” she nodded. “That’s it—to get you, and get the book, and no one but themselves would know anything about it. To get in ahead of Talamori and his crowd, Fouché said. And so—and so they’re coming, and——”

“Yes?” prompted Kenneth Wayne, as she paused again.

“That’s all,” she said. “There wasn’t any time to lose, so I sent a message to Mrs. Keene to come and stay with father this morning, because there’s hardly any change in him and he couldn’t be left alone—Doctor Pearson says it will be several days yet before he is at all himself, that in some way or other his nervous system has received a very severe shock. I hadn’t any excuse to give Mrs. Keene. I haven’t any yet. I sent word that I would explain when I saw her. I—I don’t know what explanation I can make.”

“And you’ve done this for me!” Kenneth Wayne’s voice was husky.

She did not answer.

They had come to the foot of the steep, rock-strewn ascent to The Devil’s Throat above, and instinctively she halted, even drew back a little from before it. She swayed slightly.

Kenneth Wayne leaned toward her.

“Why?” he asked.

“There was no one else to come,” she answered. Her voice was unsteady; she was trying obviously to control it. “There was no native but would have turned it treacherously to his own account; no white man because—because—oh, you know why!”

It seemed almost as though Kenneth Wayne had not heard her; or, if he had, had but brushed away her explanation as inconsequent.

“Why did *you* come?” His voice was very low.

Her head was turned away.

“I heard Walters and Fouché say that, with all the day before them, they were bound to get a shot at you if you were here.”

“Did it matter?” His blood was racing madly. It was unfair—unfair. But—God!—if it were only true! That something in her eyes! “I am an escaped prisoner—accused of murder! Did it matter? Why did you come?”

She made no answer.

He leaned closer to her, forced her to turn her head. Her eyes were full of tears, her lips were quivering. And as he held her arm he felt her sway again weakly.

“Why? Why did you come?” There was a great pleading in his voice now. “Tell me! Was it only—only to repay a debt that you perhaps felt you owed for that other night, only that, or——”

She interrupted him in almost a panic-stricken way:

“Oh, please! Please don’t! And—and mustn’t we hurry? You said we must get out of sight. And I am afraid I will have to rest a little before I go back. Is—is it up here?” She took a step forward, reeled—and caught at an overhanging branch to save herself. “It’s so stupid of me! I——”

“My God,” he cried out in sudden contrition, “you’re all played out, and I didn’t realise it! And I’ve been a blind, blundering, awkward brute! You’ll never manage that. It’s too much for you. I’ll carry you.”

“No!” she protested quickly. “You—you mustn’t!”

“I will!” he said—and gathered her up in his arms.

He saw the colour come flooding her cheeks in deep crimson waves as her head, on his shoulder, was hurriedly averted. He began to climb, holding her, enfolding her with both his arms as he struggled upward. And suddenly it seemed as though he must cry out aloud, shout out to the sunlight, and the splash of water, and the trees and rocks, because the soul of him was filled with a great ecstasy. He felt her heart beat against his own, the thrill of her yielding body as she lay passive in his arms. And for the moment no other thing in all the world mattered save that he held her thus; and for the moment he defied the fact, as indeed he had come near to defying it just a few instants gone, that he had no right to take advantage of her for this thing she had done for him, much less claim response to any love of his for he was a man who stood accused of crime before his fellows, a man whose name with its ugly blot against it made of him but a pariah and an outcast. But he

would not think of that now! Not now! Not now! She need not know—but for just this moment, for this little space of time snatched out of all eternity, if never it were to come again, she was his. And the glory of it, and the joy of it beat down and conquered and trampled underfoot the knowledge that it was but a cup of rarest nectar held sparingly to his lips that he might taste—and thereafter desire it the more as it was taken from him. And so he lingered a little as he climbed, not making the haste he might have made—and as he climbed he stumbled needlessly again and again that in his stumbling she might not know that again and again his lips had brushed her hair.

And so they came to the flat ledge of rock before The Devil's Throat.

He set her down. There was a great pulsing in his throat. He did not dare trust his voice—or for a moment look at her, though he was conscious that she, too, had turned away a little, and, uncertain and confused, stood gazing down at the mist from the breaking water as it rolled upward from the pool below.

And then he spoke, trying to infuse lightness into his voice.

"We mustn't stand here," he said. "We are in plain view from the entire length of the glade. See—this way!" He led her in under the overhanging roof of the orifice. "Now"—he laughed in an effort to guarantee the lightness of his tones—"we can't be seen, but we can see. I am afraid it is a little damp, but there is room there to sit down. Please do. It will rest you."

She was staring about her in a startled and amazed way.

"What—what a strange, strange place!" she said.

"Does it frighten you?" he asked quickly.

"Frighten me?" She shook her head, as she sat down on the rock floor. "No! Why should it? Why do you ask that?"

"Because," he said, "I am afraid I must leave you here for a few minutes alone. I must let Glover and Gulab Singh know about this at once."

"Glover! Gulab Singh!" she exclaimed. "What—what do you mean? They're not here, are they?"

"Yes," Kenneth Wayne answered quietly. "And another besides—one of Gulab Singh's men from the village, a chap named Selim Ali. They're back there at the other end of this tunnel—where the river comes out into the open again—a matter of a few hundred yards. It's not an easy passage, but one can get through."

“But I don’t understand,” she said heavily. “Gulab Singh not only knows where you are—but is here himself? Why, he has been down in Salabam mingling with everybody ever since the night Talamori came. I’ve seen him a number of times myself.”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne. “It was the safest thing he could do for me—and for himself. He’s a great chap, is Gulab Singh. He’s about the cleverest and most resourceful fellow I think I’ve ever met, and nothing seems to shake his nerve. The sort of beggar, you know, that would be the first you’d choose to have with you in a tight hole if he were a friend—and the last man on earth, from what I’ve seen of him, that I’d advise any one to pick out as an enemy. It was Gulab Singh who led the chase away from me that night and gave me a chance to escape, and then brought me here and fed me ever since.”

“And Glover?” she questioned a little numbly.

“Glover came with us. He was in the storehouse that night. I had ducked in there,” said Kenneth Wayne. “He’s a rather amazing individual too—turns out to be a British intelligence officer on a gun-running investigation. Walters and Fouché had the storehouse full of rifles and that sort of stuff—for Talamori.”

Dorothy Merwood laughed a little uncertainly.

“I see!” she said. “And he set fire to it. Well, you can tell him everything was burnt to a cinder—but perhaps Gulab Singh has already told you so?”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne. “Gulab Singh told us.” He hesitated an instant. “Do you mind if I go now? It must be a good half hour or more since you reached the glade here, and, as you said yourself, you’ve no idea how far or how close behind Walters and Fouché are. I shan’t be long—only a few minutes. I don’t like to leave you, but I wouldn’t attempt to get you through except in a case of dire necessity. It’s very bad going. Besides being extremely treacherous in places, one has to crawl in water part of the way. Do you mind?”

“No,” she said quietly. “It’s rather an eerie place, but I don’t think I mind.”

“Splendid!” he said approvingly. He took his revolver from his pocket and laid it in her lap. “I haven’t the faintest idea you’ll have any occasion to use this, but perhaps you’ll feel a little safer for its companionship. If Walters and Fouché are following the river to find the waterfall, as they naturally would be, you’ll see them the minute they come into the lower end

of the glade down there—so you must play at being on guard. I'll be back before they could get here, even if they made at once for this place, which, as they probably know nothing about it, they are not at all likely to do."

"Yes," she said. "I understand. And I will watch."

"And I promise to hurry." He turned and began to make his way into the interior of the cavernous passage. "Just a few minutes!" he called back cheerily over his shoulder.

He had said it was "bad going," and that it was treacherous and dangerous, but he had scarcely done the passage justice. Through the inky blackness the flashlight borrowed from Glover pointed the way. At times, on his belly, Kenneth Wayne crawled through water that almost submerged him; at times he clawed with his fingers at little rock crevices in the wall to preserve his balance; at times the footing was no more than a bare few inches of slippery rock, with the rush of water boiling and foaming at his boot soles. He had never timed himself in going to and fro. He only knew that this time, as he came out into the daylight on the other side, he had negotiated it far more quickly than ever before.

He stood now in the open waving his arms rapidly in semaphore fashion—the prearranged signal that there was danger at the other end and that his companions were to come at once. He dared not shout. There was always the chance of a native lurking somewhere in the woods. But either Glover, or Gulab Singh, or Selim Ali would be watching, and one of them would see him.

Fronting him, trending to the right, was a gorge with high, precipitous walls that made the river bed; to his left the woods ran parallel with a bald, rocky ridge which formed the crest of the left wall of the gorge—and now, from the edge of these woods, some two hundred yards away, a turbaned figure stepped suddenly into sight and waved its arms in response.

"Gulab Singh," muttered Kenneth Wayne, with a smile of satisfaction—and, turning abruptly, plunged back again into the passage.

He found Dorothy Merwood sitting where he had left her.

"I hope I haven't been an unconscionable time," he called out, as he came up. "Any sign of them?"

"No," she answered. "Nothing. I've never taken my eyes off that spot down there where the river leaves the glade, and I haven't seen a thing."

“Good!” ejaculated Kenneth Wayne. “The others will be along presently, and then we’ll do a little stalking ourselves. Glover’ll be immensely pleased, I fancy—more so than Mr. Walters and Monsieur Fouché before we’re through with them! We’ll have to vacate this place before nightfall though, since you say Talamori and his crowd are going to raid it then, and that’s a pity; but meanwhile we’ll attend to those two——”

He broke off abruptly. Outside, a shadow seemed to fall athwart the platform-like ledge of rock, and then another. A bit queer! The sun flirting with one of those little flapper clouds perhaps—or was it the other way around? There wasn’t any sound—only the dull, constant roar of water. But the shadows moved very quickly.

He took a step forward—and stopped as though he had been turned to stone in his tracks. Two forms blocked the opening. One was Talamori—he was merely subconsciously aware of that; he was staring into the face of the other. A great quiet seemed to settle upon him, a great stillness of mind and soul and body, as though something within him were gathering itself together, garnering its forces for some cataclysmic act.

He was staring into the face of Crimson Sash.

—XXI—

CRIMSON SASH

THERE was no longer any rock wall, any stream of rushing water, any opening out into the sunlight, any glade beyond. All these had vanished. It was as though invisible scene-shifters at work had spirited these things away, and the face and form of a man that alone remained stood forth on a re-set stage. Yellowish-white the man's face was, and around the man's waist was a band of crimson; and the face, every lineament, every feature of which was seared, and burned, and branded on Kenneth Wayne's brain, rose up now out of a rush of other faces, hideous faces, contorted faces, wide-mouthed with screams, out of a rush of half-naked fiends who brandished murderous weapons and hurled themselves along the foredeck of a crippled cargo boat—it rose up behind the shoulders of a snarling pack that jammed a narrow ladderway, and *smiled*, and with the smile a white-haired man pitched downward and stared with dead eyes up into the night.

This was Crimson Sash. Old Man Wayne was dead. This was Crimson Sash. Kenneth Wayne's brain reiterated that over and over. This was Crimson Sash.

Slowly Kenneth Wayne's hands began to creep outward from his sides—and there was something implacable, remorseless, something of deadly, irrevocable purpose in the movement of his hands. His eyes never left the other's face. It was a face in colour very near to a white man's face, a cold face, a strong face, but cruelty and superciliousness were stamped upon it, and craft was in the eyes.

He heard Crimson Sash speak in Malay to Talamori:

“Is this the man?”

And Talamori answered:

“Yes.”

And then Crimson Sash stepped forward, his fingers, in his sash, playing with the handle of a revolver.

And there was but a yard between them.

And then Crimson Sash spoke again—in English—in polished, fluent English—with poison in his words:

“A lady, too! It is more than I had expected! I came only for you, who have the *Konchi-kan Kitab*—you, who, they tell me, bring us the good news that our islands here are rich in gold, the which, I understand, is what you came to seek.”

The footing was narrow here; there was scarcely room, because of the rock wall on the one side and the racing water on the other, for two to stand abreast—but it was a *good* place. Talamori, behind Crimson Sash, and those shadows gathering out there on the rock ledge that proclaimed the presence of many men, could not come between or interfere. It was a *good* place. Kenneth Wayne’s lips moved in a twisted smile. There was no room to pass him. They could not get at Dorothy—not before she had time to run back and meet Gulab Singh and Selim Ali and Glover, and in the darkness they would be able to protect her and make their own escape. He asked no more. For himself he was satisfied. The end would come here. But first he had to tell Crimson Sash that Old Man Wayne was dead. There was no recognition in Crimson Sash’s eyes. Crimson Sash did not know him; he, Kenneth Wayne, had only been one of the many elected for butchery that night. Well, Crimson Sash would not die without knowing—for a man should know why he died.

“Gold!” It was his own voice, wasn’t it? It was the acoustics of the cavernous place that made it sound so hollow, so dead in its tone. “Yes, that is what I wanted them to tell you. But it was not gold I came to find. I could not find it, I would not be able to recognise it even if this rock here were full of it. It was not gold I came to find—it was you.”

The Malay, fingers always playing in his sash, stared frowningly.

“I am honoured,” he said ironically. “Well, you are fortunate then, for here I am—unless, perhaps, you are mistaking me for some one else. And”—his voice was suddenly malicious, baiting—“how could it be otherwise? How can you know I am the one you are seeking, since my name has not been mentioned, and you never saw me until a moment ago?”

“You are wrong,” said Kenneth Wayne monotonously. “I have seen you before. I saw you the night Old Man Wayne was murdered.”

A startled expression, gone in an instant, flashed across the Malay’s features.

“Riddles!” he said with catlike softness. “I am not good at riddles.”

“No,” said Kenneth Wayne in the same flat tone, “butchery and theft and the murder of men is what you excel in, and——”

With an oath, the other whipped the revolver from his sash.

“You won’t fire,” said Kenneth Wayne without change in his voice. “Not yet. You couldn’t expect me to tell you where The Locked Book is—if I were dead. But there is something else first that is far more important. You do not know Old Man Wayne? That is perhaps possible. Well, I will tell you about him. That is what I came to tell you. There was a ship called the *Waratan*, and she was owned by Old Man Wayne, and I was in command.”

He stopped. He heard a quick and sudden little cry from Dorothy Merwood behind him. It brought a strange smile to his lips. Yes, he was glad—glad that she should know before the end. Crimson Sash’s face was ugly with menace, with awakening fury. The man’s brows were gathered in deep, angry ridges, and, too, as though still a little puzzled.

“Perhaps you did not know the ship’s name either,” Kenneth Wayne went on, “for you attacked her in the night. To you she was only a helpless thing—at your mercy, as you thought—with broken engines. Ah! You remember! It was not so very long ago—just a few months——”

“God!” the Malay roared out suddenly. “That was your ship, was it!” And then laughter came, a laughter of mocking fury, and the encircling walls of rock caught it up and amplified it into a hideous din. “Your ship, was it? Then there is no man I would rather meet! There is a payment to be made, a score to settle—yes? That is what you came for? You are right! And the score is heavy. You killed many of my men that night.”

“But not enough,” said Kenneth Wayne, “for Old Man Wayne was murdered that night. Murdered by you. You shot him down on the foredeck ladder—and you *smiled*.” Kenneth Wayne’s hands were open, the fingers wide apart, fixed, rigid, curved like claws. His voice was breaking hoarsely. “He took the shot you meant for me. And so I have come—because the gunboat could not find you—because I am the son of Old Man Wayne—because I——”

His voice was drowned out. There was a great roaring in his ears. The vaulted place echoed and re-echoed with it. For an instant it seemed to stun both mind and body. From somewhere behind him a shot had come—not from Dorothy—farther back. Yes, he understood now. Gulab Singh and the others were coming. He saw Crimson Sash clap his hand to his cheek—and,

behind Crimson Sash, he saw one of the figures that were crowding the entrance reel backwards. It was quick, almost instantaneous, as though it had all happened in the winking of an eye. Something of unholy joy surged upon him. The shot had only grazed Crimson Sash—his was the reckoning with Crimson Sash! He leaped forward. Crimson Sash's revolver jerked upward—but the man had no time to fire. With a blow, lightning swift, Kenneth Wayne knocked the weapon from the other's hand.

"This is between you and me," he heard his voice cry out—and his arms locked around Crimson Sash.

He heard cries and shouts from all around him. He caught sight of faces, Malay faces, peering from craned necks in through the opening; forms massed on the rock ledge without—but they could not come at him—there was only room here for Crimson Sash and himself. He heard a girl's voice behind him, heard other voices, heard Gulab Singh constantly crying out something that was unintelligible.

Kenneth Wayne laughed out suddenly.

. . . Old Man Wayne and Crimson Sash. . . . Old Man Wayne and Crimson Sash. . . .

His brain was singing the refrain.

He was body to body with Crimson Sash, straining the other to him in an embrace that made the muscles crack; he was face to face with Crimson Sash—he could look into the whites of the other's eyes. And the *feel* of the other's body was good—like this place in which they had met—it was all good. It wriggled, that body, and twisted and squirmed, but it could not get away; and it panted heavily, and fierce, gasping breaths fanned Kenneth Wayne's cheeks, and snarls and curses were in his ears—like music—music to which his soul listened greedily—greedily—greedily——

The man was lithe and strong as a panther, and with the fury of one. And underfoot there was little room, and the rock, shelving, narrow, on which they swayed and lurched, straining at each other until the sweat beads poured out upon their faces, was wet and treacherous. And Crimson Sash slipped, and for an instant in strange immobility, like figures poised, they hung together out over the swirl of water that, as it raced along, seemed to lick hungrily at their feet.

And they tottered there.

And a girl's voice from somewhere in the darkness rang out in a scream of agony and fear.

And Kenneth Wayne's answer was another laugh—a great laugh. It welled up from the soul of him—a peal of it. It was dawning in the other's eyes at last! That was why he laughed. Fear—there was *fear* there.

They swung back from the brink, and like some ungainly pendulum out of adjustment smashed up against the wall.

Higher up the other's body Kenneth Wayne's hands worked their way remorselessly. The man was struggling to break the hold, struggling frantically, madly, with panic strength now to break away. Higher, just a little higher—to that naked throat. His fingers crept inward along the other's shoulders, his hugging arms pinioning those of Crimson Sash as in a vise—an inch—another—still another. And then his hands locked suddenly together, and the fingers were inmeshed in flesh—all of them—tightening—boring their way into the other's throat.

And again they hung tottering over the water's edge, far over, bending outward, farther and farther—and swayed as a toppling wall sways for that breathless instant before its fall.

And a gurgling cry—of terror—of wild, mad fear—came from Crimson Sash.

And Kenneth Wayne's fingers tightened—and tightened.

“This is between you and me,” said Kenneth Wayne, as beneath him foothold was gone as though it had been snatched away, “between you and me—and Old Man Wayne——”

A rush of waters closed over his head. But a wriggling thing was still in his grasp. It would always be in his grasp. Tighter—tighter—something, not the thing itself, seemed to be striving to tear his fingers loose.

He was being twisted and turned and rolled over and over, and being swept along with tremendous impetus. He was conscious of a sudden flash of sunlight as he was shot out through the opening to the crest of the falls; conscious of figures on a rocky platform, of cries—and then he was falling—falling with incredible swiftness—and yet ever swifter. There was the sense of being *hurled* downward—hurled downward encased in some enveloping thing in which he could not breathe.

His fingers tightened—tightened—the nails bit into flesh. There was a roaring in his brain, but what he held should not be torn away from him—that was the one thing—the one thing—the one thing—*Gone!* Was it gone? The flesh that his nails bit into was the flesh of his own hands. He was being pounded and struck as though by mighty hammers—*thud, thud, thud*—by

mighty hammers of mighty weight—*thud, thud, thud*—and his body turned as though rotating on a spit.

It was relenting now. It wasn't so merciless—only his lungs were bursting. A mental fog seemed to be clearing away. He began to understand. An eddy was carrying him away from beneath the bottom of the falls where the water had pounded upon him. He was shot suddenly into still water. He felt himself rising to the surface. His lungs were bursting. Air! He must breathe. Air! But he remembered those figures on the ledge. They would still be peering down—peering down. He must not be seen. But air—air! God, he must have air! He was rising upward. He turned on his back—just his face above the water—he wasn't so far gone but that he could manage that.

He drew great breaths into his lungs. Seen! What matter did that make if Crimson Sash were here too! But there was no sign of Crimson Sash—only a mist rising from where the water thundered at the bottom of the falls a dozen yards away from him now. He had forgotten about that mist.

There wasn't any sign of Crimson Sash. He couldn't find the man under water anyway, could he? He was a fool to lie here—even if only his face showed above the surface. Resting? He was rested enough. He'd drift out beyond that curtain of mist presently, and they'd get him with a rifle shot. There was only one side of the pool by which the actual orifice of The Devil's Throat was accessible—and obviously that was where Crimson Sash's men were. He must reach the opposite bank—that was the only way out.

He managed to get his bearings and began to swim under water. Dorothy—Gulab Singh—the others. He must reach them now—if he could. They would be trapped like rats in there if the *Orang-laut* got around first and blocked the other end. But Gulab Singh wouldn't let them do that—neither would Glover—good men—good men both of them—they wouldn't waste any time in getting through to the open on the other side. The open! What then—with the woods thick with the *Orang-laut*! He must get to them—somehow—quickly—take his place with them—Dorothy—

His hands touched something, a large rock, it seemed—and reaching out farther touched what must be the bank of the pool. He raised his head cautiously. Luck! It was a rock, a huge rock, that rose several feet out of the water just at the edge of the shore. Yes, it was luck! He could crawl out behind it with very little chance of being seen—and just a yard beyond was the sure shelter of heavy foliage.

Sounds reached him now—queerly muffled by the roar of the falls: cries, shouts, and—he could not be sure—rifle shots as though at a great distance away. He drew himself out of the water behind the rock, wriggled like a snake on its belly over the bank, and gained the protecting screen of bush and trees.

And then for an instant he paused to take note of the scene around him. High up above him, on the rocky platform before The Devil's Throat, two figures stood shading their eyes with their hands, as though searching intently the waters of the pool. On the opposite bank other figures were running up and down, now pausing, now running on again, undoubtedly engaged in the same search as their fellows above them. He saw nothing else. For the moment he was safe. They had not seen him.

He rose to his feet and began to make his way as rapidly as he could through the entangling growth and up the steep ascent of the thickly wooded hillside. He reached the summit, far above The Devil's Throat. Then on! Underneath him, deep down in the darkness, they were fighting probably. It spurred him to greater effort. The *Orang-laut* would not all be forcing their way through the underground passage, driving Gulab Singh and the others back; some of them would make a circuit around over there on the left—not up here where he was—over there around the base of the hill—it was farther—but the natural way to go.

And now he heard a shot, sharp, clear—another—and another. He had crossed the top of the hill and was scrambling downward now, clinging to rocks and bushes, half falling, half sliding in desperate haste. Below him, he saw Gulab Singh standing on the edge of the river bank and apparently just abreast of the spot where the river on this side entered the underground passage—saw the man raise his arm and fire again and again. And farther off, running toward the barren ridge that paralleled the woods and also made the outer wall of the river gorge, he saw three figures—a woman and two men.

—XXII—

MONSIEUR NICHOLAS FOUCHÉ

S TUMBLING, falling, scrambling, Kenneth Wayne went on down the hillside toward Gulab Singh. He could see those three figures still making for the top of the ridge, not more than four hundred yards away—a woman's figure, and the figures of two men—and one of the men was aiding the woman, and the other man carried a great basket. Strange that details, little details, should stand out so sharply in his mind. Queer! That was Selim Ali tenaciously clinging to the basket of food. Of course they couldn't live up there without food. Gulab Singh was the rear guard—but Gulab Singh might wait too long. It wasn't only those who had followed through the underground river passage; the bulk of the *Orang-laut* would come circling around the hillside to the left, and out through the woods here and trap Gulab Singh. They ought to have been here by now, for, though it was longer than the way he had come, it was a far easier way. Perhaps they had lost time in searching the pool—perhaps they had all at first attempted to force the passage from the other end—but they would come—any minute now——

He came down beside Gulab Singh.

Gulab Singh did not turn his head.

“My heart was heavy with a great fear, sahib,” he said, and fired across the face of the dark, yawning opening beside him, where the water rushed, plunging madly away, as eager here, it seemed, to evade the sunlight as on the other side it was to welcome it once more. “But now it is light again for the sahib lives.”

“Yes, but I won't live long, and neither will you, if we stay here,” said Kenneth Wayne with a short laugh. “I know there can't any more than one man come out of there at a time because there's no footing inside, and I know they can't fire at us here at this angle without coming out to do it—but it's not only those chaps inside there. The others are bound to come around upon us through the woods.”

“That I know, sahib,” Gulab Singh answered—and fired again. “And it is because of that, sahib, that there was no shelter for us in the woods. And up there from whence you came, sahib, it was too difficult for the Miss Sahib and we would be overtaken; and along the river bed there is no shelter either, for from each side we would be fired down upon. There was only the ridge over there, sahib; but between here and there a bullet may fly straight for there is nothing between, even as it will be, sahib, in our favour, if, when we are there, they try to come upon us. When the Miss Sahib is at the top and is hidden by the rocks, I will go. But go you now, sahib, for there is need for no more than one here.”

And then Kenneth Wayne laughed again—but there was a strange throatiness in his laugh.

“We’ll go together, Gulab Singh,” he said, “or not at all. I wouldn’t care to face the Miss Sahib without her Grand Vizier after this.”

“As the sahib wills.” Gulab Singh fired coolly once more. “And of the other, sahib,” he asked in a grave voice, “he with whom the sahib fought? Does he live?”

“I don’t know.” Kenneth Wayne was scanning the edge of the woods intently. “We were torn apart by the water. I didn’t see him when I came up.” He touched Gulab Singh on the arm. “I think I heard something in there just now, Gulab Singh.”

“Yes, sahib,” Gulab Singh answered. “Look, then, and see if the Miss Sahib is at the top.”

Kenneth Wayne swung around.

“I can’t see any of them now,” he said.

“It is well,” said Gulab Singh. “Listen, then, sahib—and we will go. One man I shot, the first man, as he tried to come out of here. It has made the others careful. We will have a minute, sahib, and one can run far in the space of a minute; but that they may not know at once we are gone when there are no more shots, we must run without noise. Is the sahib ready?”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne tersely.

“Run, then, sahib!” said Gulab Singh, as he fired another shot and a little fountain of water spurted up from his bullet in front of the opening. “Run, sahib—and run fast!”

With Gulab Singh beside him, Kenneth Wayne turned and ran. A minute! Yes, one could go far in a minute—but it was all open here, and

bare rock, and there was a stiff rise even to the base of the ridge. He ran—ran with all that was in him. He was conscious that Gulab Singh was running much more smoothly than he was, more easily, far more in hand, as though, indeed, without effort the man might have streaked by him like an arrow. It was on account of Crimson Sash, of course, that fight with Crimson Sash—and the afterwards. He was a bit shaken up—not quite fit. The pace was telling.

A shot came from somewhere behind him—and then a ripple of fire. He thought he heard the *spat* of a flattening bullet somewhere near him. And then from above him, in front, answering shots rang out. That would be Glover and Selim Ali, of course. He glanced back over his shoulder. Whether it was from those who had been held in check by Gulab Singh and who could now have easily taken cover in the woods, or from the rest of the *Orang-laut* who might have arrived upon the scene, he could not tell, but in any case, whoever it was, they were firing from the edge of the trees—not attempting to come out or give chase across the open stretch under Glover’s and Selim Ali’s fire.

He was at the foot of the ridge now, with Gulab Singh still beside him. There was not much farther to go, but it was a steep, uneven ascent. He began to zigzag his course—the *Orang-laut* weren’t particularly good marksmen—or else he was in luck—in luck. The firing grew brisker, both from above him and from the trees behind. Just a few more yards to go—just a—

“Oh, well run, old man!” Glover’s voice shouted out cheerily. “Here, get down behind that rock!”

Panting, gasping, Kenneth Wayne flung himself down. He dashed the sweat out of his eyes, and stared around him. He was on a small plateau, one of a series probably extending all along the ridge. It was perhaps a hundred yards square, its surface furrowed with rock crevices, and strewn here and there with little upstanding ledges and loose boulders. Dorothy Merwood’s face, from close beside him where she lay flat on the ground, smiled up into his—a strange, tremulous smile. She was white—looked utterly done out as she lay there behind the little ledge, like a rampart, that sheltered them all. He leaned quickly toward her. And his surroundings, Gulab Singh’s great turban shaking with the man’s exertions, Selim Ali, Glover, all crouching here, became for the moment apart, extraneous. He saw only the blue eyes that looked at him through a sudden mist, and lips that quivered with that strange, tremulous smile.

“Thank God,” he said hoarsely in a broken way, “thank God, thank God, that you are safe!”

And then he saw the colour begin to mount a little and drive the deathly whiteness from her cheeks.

“That *I* am safe!” Her voice was very low. She shook her head. “It was you. I—we—we did not think we would ever see you again. We—we thought that you were dead.”

There was something in her eyes, a great wistfulness, a glorious shyness, that set his blood to racing madly. Words, burning, eager, passionate, were on his lips; the soul of him was crying out for expression. But he had no right—no right. He was a pariah among men. He wanted her—out of all the world he wanted her—wanted to hold her in his arms—close to him—tenderly. He had held her once——

He was a pariah.

His hands clenched until the knuckles were chalky white.

“Yes—I—I fancy you did,” he said inanely. There was a great choking in his throat.

He turned his head away, and lay staring out through a fissure in the rock—staring down the slope of the ridge. There was no sign of the *Orang-laut*; just the green of the trees in the sunlight across the short, barren stretch of ground, and, farther to the left, the up-sweep of the hillside through which the river bored its way; just a glimpse of the river itself where for an instant it glinted in the light before it plunged out of sight on its subterranean way—no sign of any living man. Something was the matter. He was living in a world of unreality. There was peace here, a perfect peace, over which nature presided in cheery, beauteous, smiling mood. No conflict! The conflict, then, could only be within himself—his soul in strife and turmoil, battling to throttle, to strangle, to destroy something that stood between it and its impulse and its yearning to plead his cause. Well, why shouldn’t he plead it—why shouldn’t he? If she cared, love rose above this thing men said of him, love transcended accusation, ignored it, and in its loyalty swept aside the thought of consequences, would not falter before ruin, disgrace, the brand of murder. And in return it was repaid with—what? *His* love? God pity him for a coward, then! He swept his clenched hand across his eyes. Madness! Unreality! That was a shot, wasn’t it—the *ping* of a bullet through the air?

Glover’s voice came from a few yards away.

"I think the sport's over for the moment. They'll waste a bit of ammunition from time to time from behind the trees, and we'll have to keep our heads down; but they'll think twice about trying to cross that open stretch and climb up here. The floor's yours, Wayne. We heard a little of what you said to that chap you carried over the falls with you—and about you having come here to find him—something about your father. It sounded queer—my word! Miss Merwood, I think, heard it all—but I'm jolly curious. If it isn't flicking on the raw, old chap, do you mind telling it again, while we're waiting for those beggars to make the next move?"

Kenneth Wayne was still staring through the fissure in the rock. He was glad of Glover's intervention—he wasn't sure enough of himself yet to pick up the thread of his conversation with the girl beside him. He smiled a little wanly as he shook his head.

"No," he said, "I don't mind now. There's nothing to hide any more. If he's dead—he's dead. If he's alive, he knows I'm here and what I came for. I do not know his name—I called him Crimson Sash."

He paused a moment; and then, his chin in his hands, he told his story. And as he spoke he was conscious again of an acute sense of unreality. The story of Old Man Wayne here on this rocky ridge, with Crimson Sash's followers out there, perhaps even Crimson Sash himself, mad again with blood-lust, as they had been that night on the *Waratan*; the same quiet, the stillness over all that had formed the same prelude to that other attack! He was conscious that Gulab Singh, listening, lay like some carved figure, utterly inert, utterly motionless, as though it possessed no life; conscious that Selim Ali had drawn nearer, and that the man's dark, swarthy face was intent, eager, and at times a little troubled as though he understood imperfectly; conscious that Glover kept on interminably packing down the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe with the ball of his thumb and made no attempt to light it. He did not look at Dorothy Merwood. And at the end he was absurdly conscious of something else—that his throat was dry, that he craved water, that the sun was beating down pitilessly hot.

A silence fell as his voice died away. It endured for a long time. It was Gulab Singh who spoke.

"Sahib," he said gravely, "it is a strange tale that the sahib has told; and it is in my mind that yet a stranger thing will come of it if this man that the sahib calls Crimson Sash still lives. But the sahib does not know what happened in the water?"

“No,” said Kenneth Wayne. “Unless I had the breath out of him before we went over, he had as much chance as I had.”

Glover lighted his pipe coolly now.

“A rum go, Wayne!” he ejaculated. “He’s the bird, of course, that Talamori was buying that stack of arms for, and, whether he’s alive or dead, I wish to God I knew where his headquarters were! We’d clean up this bunch of followers of his here when they went back—even if you haven’t much faith in gunboats.”

Kenneth Wayne shook his head.

“I think we’d better look for some way of getting out of this first ourselves,” he said a little grimly. “We appear to be all right for the time being; but we also seem to be perched up here on the top of a sort of pinnacle that is as much a trap as it is a refuge. What do you say, Gulab Singh?”

“Sahib,” said Gulab Singh, “we have food, for Selim Ali has brought the food basket, but we have no water. They cannot come upon us from behind because of the wall of the gorge which cannot be climbed; and from in front we can shoot them as they come unless they are brave enough to come all at once and lose many in the coming. And, sahib, I do not think they will do that. While it is daylight, sahib, we are safe.”

“And after that?” demanded Kenneth Wayne tersely.

Gulab Singh did not answer for a moment.

“What is written is written, sahib,” he said at last. “Sahib, I do not know.”

Kenneth Wayne’s lips set hard together. He looked around him more critically now. They were on the top of a narrow ridge that extended for a long distance following the river’s course, but everywhere it was barren and without shelter save, as where he now lay, for loose boulders and out-cropping ledges of rock; and everywhere, facing the ridge, leaving as it were a sort of No Man’s Land between, the woods ran on to where, far to the right, the ridge tapered down again, and ridge, woods and river seemed to meet and mingle once more. One could not go that way. To lift one’s head was to invite a shot; and, even by crawling, one would be seen in the sparser places where there were no protecting ledges and no protecting rocks. And even if one gained the far end of the ridge, the *Orang-laut*, watching the manœuvre, would be waiting there, just as they were waiting here—amongst the trees.

He moved suddenly from his position, and on hands and knees crawled across to the rear of the little plateau on which they had taken refuge, and, peering over, looked down into the gorge below. There was a sheer drop here, not of many feet, perhaps not more than thirty-five or forty to where the river boiled below, but the rock wall was as smooth and perpendicular as though it had been sliced off with a knife. It was unscalable from below. In that, Gulab Singh had been right.

Kenneth Wayne's eyes searched the opposite bank or wall of the river. He nodded sharply to himself. The other side was much lower. There was very little to warrant optimism in the situation—the most favourable factor of all was that they could not be fired *down* upon from the opposite bank.

It was bad! He felt a whiteness creep into his face. As long as daylight lasted and they could see, they could probably hold off the *Orang-laut*; but with darkness, with Heaven knew how many creeping up the face of the ridge and spread out over several hundred yards, the end was inevitable. And the *Orang-laut* were not fools—they knew that too.

He lay quiet for a moment, outstretched, his back to the others, apparently gazing out across the gorge—but his head was buried in his arms, and his hands were tightly clenched. *Dorothy!* There must be a way, some way to get her out of this. She had come here for his sake—for him. Get help? How? Where? What help was there to get even if one of them here managed by some miracle to get through to the town? A handful of white men! What was a handful of white men! These were the devils, the same shrieking, piratical spawn that had swarmed the decks of the *Waratan* that night; these were Crimson Sash's followers who lived by murder, outrage and pillage. He did not know how many. Talamori had between twenty and thirty with him, judging from the numbers in the road in front of the hotel the other night. How many had Crimson Sash brought? A handful of white men! The handful of white men would be murdered too.

"Dorothy!" Kenneth Wayne whispered. "Oh, God!"

This quest of his! This was the end of it, wasn't it—whether Crimson Sash were dead or not? Strange! Queer! Something, a sinister irony, seemed to have mocked him, toyed with him, made sport of him from the beginning—and now at the end it had reserved for itself the most diabolical thrust of all. He had counted, as he had thought, all the cost when he had set out, he had neither shut his eyes nor been blind to his own risk and peril; but in it and through it all he had considered only the personal equation. He had not counted on this—that a woman should pay too—that a woman should come

into his life—that it should be that woman who was to pay—she who was innocent of all this, still glorying in her youth, joyous, glad that God had given her life—and perhaps—perhaps—who knew?—glad of a dawning love—glad that——

He lifted his head suddenly at a shout from Glover; and, turning, scrambled back to rejoin the others.

“Look!” Glover cried. “Look! That’s Walters and Fouché, isn’t it? Or am I crazy? What’s it mean? Where did they come from?”

Kenneth Wayne flung himself down behind the ledge of rock, and stared out again through the fissure.

Just opposite him, two men, two white men, had burst out from the edge of the woods and were coming toward the rise of the ridge, running in mad haste across the open space. He stared incredulously. It *was* Walters and Fouché! He did not understand. How had they got through the *Orang-laut* there—the *Orang-laut* were all massed in the woods at exactly that spot.

An outburst of yells, shrieks, screams, wild laughter, peals of it, peals on peals of it, came suddenly from the woods, from scores, it seemed, of hidden and inhuman throats—and then the crackle of rifle fire—little white whiffs of smoke spurting from along the line of trees.

The two men came on desperately—ten—twenty—thirty yards. And then Mr. Walters from Manchester flung up his hands in a queer, spasmodic, jerky way, pitched forward on his face—and lay still.

Nicholas Fouché still ran. He ran like a man crazed with fear; he leaped from side to side; he ran half doubled up; and as he came nearer his face showed grey, ashen, the eyes strained, fixed, seeming almost to be protruding from their sockets.

Nearer the man came with slithering gait up the slope, spurred on by the yells and demoniacal laughter behind him, the shots, the bullets that chipped bits from the ground and rocks beneath his feet—and his screams now arose above all other sounds, for he screamed in terror, his mouth wide open.

It was a miserable thing to see. Kenneth Wayne’s jaws were clamped and set.

“Lie down! Take cover behind the rocks, and crawl the rest of the way!” he shouted. “Lie down! Lie down!”

And it seemed almost as though the man had heard and obeyed, for on the instant Monsieur Nicholas Fouché, with a great despairing cry, fell

forward, and, with both hands clutching at his side, lay twisting and writhing upon the ground.

He lay twenty yards from the top of the ridge.

“My God!” cried Kenneth Wayne, and started up, “we can’t leave him out there!”

“Wait!” Glover’s voice answered hoarsely. “He’s coming on again. He’ll make it.”

The man crawled now, one yard and then another—painfully, slowly. And then the fusillade of shots ceased abruptly, the cries and shrieks and laughter from the woods died away—and Monsieur Nicholas Fouché lay gasping in Kenneth Wayne’s arms behind the little rampart-like ledge of rocks.

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché did not speak. He lay with closed eyes.

Glover, leaning forward, tore the man’s clothing open.

There was the sound of cloth being ripped; and then Dorothy Merwood’s voice in a half sob as she extended a portion of her skirt:

“Can—can you do anything with this?”

Glover took the piece of skirt, but shook his head as he began to staunch the flow of blood in Monsieur Fouché’s side.

“No use, I’m afraid, Miss Merwood,” he said gruffly. “I don’t think he’s got more than a few minutes.”

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché opened his eyes, stared around him vacantly for a moment, and then a strange and sudden fury seemed to sweep into his face, to dominate him, to imbue him with unnatural strength. He wrenched himself almost free from Kenneth Wayne’s supporting arms, and struggled into a sitting posture. His face was contorted; his lips worked as though out of all muscular control; he raised his hand and shook it, clenched, frantically.

“Messieurs,” he screamed out, “he is a fiend! There is no greater fiend in hell! *Dieu! Nom de Dieu!* He said that since Walters and I started first this morning for The Locked Book it was but fair—*fair*, that is what he said, and laughed—that we should have the first chance to come up here to you and get it. And he drove us out from the woods, and shot us down as we ran.”

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché sank back, struggling for his breath.

Gulab Singh’s voice came gravely out of a momentary silence:

“Is it of the man Wayne Sahib calls Crimson Sash that he speaks?”

“Crimson Sash? Yes—*sacré nom de Dieu*—a sash of blood! Eh—yes—that is it! The man who fell over the falls into the pool,” cried Monsieur Nicholas Fouché.

“Ah!” Gulab Singh drew a deep breath. “He lives, then?”

“Yes! Yes, he lives! He——” Monsieur Nicholas Fouché’s voice choked. “Give—give me water,” he gasped.

Kenneth Wayne shook his head.

“We have none, Fouché,” he said gently.

“No water! *Tonnerre*, that is strange! No water! I ask only for a little water, and there is no water.” He was mumbling. His voice died out. He lay passive for a moment; then suddenly into his face again swept the surge of fury, and again he struggled upward in Kenneth Wayne’s arms. “I die, messieurs—eh, I die?” he cried out. “Yes, I see it in your eyes. I die—and *he* lives! But he will die too—he and Talamori. You will get out of here. You must get out of here, and then you will hang them, messieurs—eh—you will see to that—hang them! I will tell you. Quick! Listen! I will tell you so that they may be hanged. He is a murderer. He murdered Walters out there—eh—you saw that! And Talamori is a murderer—Talamori murdered Major Peters—and I——”

He fell weakly back again.

Kenneth Wayne heard a low cry in a girl’s voice; a quick, gruff, throaty exclamation from Glover. He felt a sudden cessation of his own heartbeats.

“Talamori!” he cried out. “You know that?”

“Yes,” said Monsieur Nicholas Fouché. “I know that. I swear it—before God I swear it. They said it was you. But it was Talamori. Talamori told me. I had business with Talamori that night. Talamori came to Salabam that night, but he did not come at once to me. You understand? It was The Locked Book that everybody talked of. He went first to Major Peters and some of his men were with him, and he murdered Major Peters, but he did not get the book—it—it was gone.”

Once more his voice died away—the man was perceptibly growing weaker.

“And afterwards,” said Kenneth Wayne quickly, “you arranged with Talamori to attack the hotel because you thought I still had it?”

“Yes,” said Monsieur Nicholas Fouché. “That is true. But there is more. Quick! Listen! I do not speak fast enough. The man that is with Talamori—Talamori’s chief. They call him Malatea. He too had heard that The Locked Book was found. He came fast to Salabam to get it, to—to take it from whoever had it. He came very early this morning. I was at the place where Talamori’s proas were when he came. He came with two more proas. Every one seemed to be in great fear of him. Talamori speaks a little English. I have always talked to Talamori in English. Malatea and Talamori spoke together in Malay. I pretended that I did not understand what they said, but I understood well enough. I—wait! For the pity of God, hold me tighter! Let—let me rest a minute.”

Monsieur Nicholas Fouché closed his eyes. He fought for his breath, his fingers clutching at his throat. When he spoke again it was feebly, little above a whisper:

“Malatea wanted to make sure that there was no mistake about The Locked Book. He sent for the Malays who had gone with Wayne to the Cheruchuk River. They came and—and grovelled before him. They were afraid of him. They described the book, and—and—don’t let me go, Wayne—hold me tighter—this—this is for you—you’re—you’re clear, Monsieur Wayne. Before God I swear this too is true. They said they had murdered the old priest to get the book, but they couldn’t find it.”

Again Monsieur Nicholas Fouché from sheer weakness had ceased speaking; but it was Kenneth Wayne now who closed his eyes. *Clear!* There was a great throbbing in his brain. *Clear!* It perhaps did not make any material difference now—it was too late. There wasn’t much chance that it would do him any good, much chance of getting out of here alive—much more chance than this dying man had. But *she* had heard. She knew. Strange and confused wonder was in his mind. He wondered if that helped any—or made it the harder? Was it easier to face the end because he had the right now to speak, and, if she cared, glimpse for an instant what the years might have held—or was it the bitterer, the harder thing?

He heard Glover speak in a low, strained voice:

“Thank God, for your sake, Wayne!” And then, a moment later, in a still lower tone: “I think he’s gone. Gulab Singh will help me carry him across to the other side there. You see what you can do for Miss Merwood. She’s about at the end, I’d say—been through more than most women could stand.”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne briefly.

He relinquished his burden to Gulab Singh, and turned around. Dorothy Merwood was lying outstretched, her face buried in her arms, her shoulders shaking with convulsive sobs. And as he looked at her, he covered his own face for a moment with his hands. Death! Life! God, not death for her—Dorothy—not that! He loved her.

His lips moved—his voice was full of yearning, full of anguish, as he drew close to her side.

“Dorothy!” he whispered. “Dorothy!” he said again—and his voice broke—and his arm crept around her shoulders.

His head was close to hers, his lips touched her hair. He drew her nearer to him. She had made no answer, but his hand, encircling her shoulders, had found one of hers—and suddenly found it held very tightly, as though clasped by a frightened child—held very tightly against a tear-wet cheek.

Subconsciously he was aware that Selim Ali lay motionless a little way off, a sentinel, keeping watch down the face of the ridge; while, farther off, near the edge of the gorge, Gulab Singh and Glover still bent over a form that now lay prone upon the ground.

“Dorothy, you care! You care!” It was his heart crying out to her. “You came here to this—because you cared!”

And then for an instant she raised her head, and in her eyes through the tears a great glory shone.

“I care,” she answered—and hid her face. “Oh, I care so much—so much! And—and I am not afraid any more.”

—XXIII—

THE BOOK UNLOCKED

THEY had begun firing again. There was a desultory *spat* of bullets as they struck the rocks, little spurts of dust when they flicked the softer ground. Kenneth Wayne had secured a revolver from Selim Ali now, and lay watching the line of trees at the foot of the ridge intently. It might be merely an effort to inspire fear or keep fear alive, or the chance of a bullet finding its mark, or the prelude to a rush up the slope.

He fingered his revolver grimly. As Gulab Singh had said, the *Orang-laut* could carry the ridge if they came on with enough determination and were willing to pay the price. But, so far, there was no sign of movement from below.

Glover crawled up beside him and lay down. Their eyes met—Glover had been a long time over there with Fouché.

“Yes,” said Glover, answering the unspoken query in Kenneth Wayne’s face. “He’s gone, poor beggar; but he was able to say a few more words—came around a bit first. Practically Miss Merwood’s story. A native came in to tell this Crimson Sash of yours that you were hiding up the river. Crimson Sash asked Fouché if he had understood what the native had said, and Fouché said he didn’t. But Crimson Sash was the cleverer trickster of the two. He wasn’t taking any chances, and he gave Fouché the proverbial rope with which to hang himself if Fouché were up to any double play. Crimson Sash said he would wait until dark and then set out after you, but what he really did was to set a watch on Fouché. He caught the two of them, Fouché and Walters, before they were a mile up the river. After that, he marched them along with him—and you know the end of it.”

Kenneth Wayne nodded without comment.

“What are the blighters up to now?” queried Glover abruptly. “Merely wasting ammunition—or what?”

Kenneth Wayne forced a laugh.

“Beyond me!” he said lightly. “Anyway, they’re not doing us any harm.” And then, his voice lowered so that Dorothy Merwood on his other side might not hear: “Glover, what are we going to do—*when it gets dark?*”

Glover’s face was set. He echoed Kenneth Wayne’s low tones.

“God alone knows!” he said heavily. “If it weren’t for her, I’d say we might as well make up our minds to go out with our boots on; and, as it is, I can’t see any other answer. We’ll give her what chance there is, of course. Some of us will hold on here while she runs for it. She might make it, if it’s dark enough.”

Kenneth Wayne shook his head.

“They’re not to be fooled that way. They’ll take care that *no one* gets off the ridge. That’s no good.”

“No,” said Glover simply. “I know it. That’s no good.”

The firing grew more desultory—and died away.

Gulab Singh, lying next beyond Glover, was talking earnestly with Selim Ali. Once or twice Kenneth Wayne caught the name of Malatea—that was Crimson Sash’s name. Kenneth Wayne smiled suddenly and bitterly to himself. There was not even the consolation of having at the end kept his pledge to Old Man Wayne. Crimson Sash was still alive. Worse than that! More than merely alive! It wouldn’t be Old Man Wayne this time; it would be—would be——

He gnawed at his lips as though his thoughts were audible and he were striving to crush them back and refuse them utterance. Some way! Some way! There *must* be some way! *He* had brought her to this. He had brought love into her life, and the penalty was—— No! It was unbearable. The thought was hideous. He knew his face was drawn, haggard, grey and full of fear. He hid it from both Glover and Dorothy Merwood.

And then he heard Gulab Singh’s grave, unemotional voice:

“Sahib, Selim Ali and I have talked together, and we have drawn lots. Will the sahibs listen?”

Gulab Singh had pushed the food basket in between Glover and himself. Food! Kenneth Wayne laughed out harshly, involuntarily, in spite of himself. The thought seemed to plumb the depths of irony. Food! It was like the condemned being given breakfast a few minutes before they were led out to execution. But some of them ate it! Damned queer! Damned morbid! He mustn’t lose his grip—that was the only thing left!

“I’m not hungry,” said Glover quietly: “but perhaps Miss Merwood _____”

“No,” Dorothy Merwood said. “I don’t think I care for any just now, thank you.”

“It was not of that we talked,” said Gulab Singh. “Sahibs, it was of that which was left for us to do. The man that Wayne Sahib calls Crimson Sash still lives and he is out there with many of his men, and we are few and powerless against force; but, sahibs, perchance if that which he came for were given to him, the lives of the Miss Sahib and the sahibs would be saved. It is in my mind, sahibs, that we give him—*this*!”

With a sharp cry, Kenneth Wayne sat bolt upright. He stared incredulously. It was absurdly chimerical—the East Indians were great at that sort of thing. He’d seen one once do the rose-bush trick—make it grow out of the earth before his eyes. The cleverest magicians in the world! Of course! That was what Gulab Singh was doing—but it wouldn’t fool Crimson Sash. Apparently, in Gulab Singh’s hands, extracted from the food basket that Selim Ali had so sedulously guarded, lay The Locked Book, dragon-covered, the *Konchi-kan Kitab* of Kana-ee-a. He heard a sudden burst of firing—the spatter of lead against the rocks.

“The sahib must not lift his head like that,” said Gulab Singh in grave reproval.

Glover had said nothing. Jaw dropped, he was gazing helplessly at Gulab Singh. Kenneth Wayne mechanically resumed his recumbent position. He felt Dorothy Merwood’s hand clasp and hold his arm tightly. The Locked Book! He reached suddenly over Glover’s back and snatched it from Gulab Singh’s hands. He stared at it again. He *felt* it. It wasn’t trickery. It was real—the mildewed leather, worn in spots—the heavy brass superimposed scroll—the tail over the edges fast locked in the dragon’s mouth.

“By God, it was you, then, who stole it out of my room the other night!” he burst out. His face set like iron. “This will require some explaining, Gulab Singh!”

“It is true, sahib, that I took the book that night,” said Gulab Singh quietly; “and it is also true that the tale of it should be told—but first, sahib, there is the matter of bargaining with Malatea, whom the sahib calls Crimson Sash, in order that the Miss Sahib’s and the sahibs’ lives be saved.”

“To say nothing of your own and Selim Ali’s!” added Glover, with a sharp and sudden laugh. “Better to lose the book than your own two

precious skins, eh? Never mind about the Miss Sahib, or Wayne and myself! I fancy we wouldn't be much of a factor if you could still get away with it again yourself!"

Gulab Singh bowed his head. The great turban almost hid his face.

"Those are hard words, sahib," he said in a low voice. "Does the sahib forget that it was Gulab Singh who led the way to safety that night? Does Wayne Sahib forget?"

Glover coughed suddenly, uncomfortably.

Kenneth Wayne pushed his hand across a wet brow. It was pitilessly hot. There was no shade, no shelter. Perhaps it was the sun pouring down so mercilessly that confused him.

"It's damned queer!" he said helplessly. "No; I don't forget. You saved my life that night. And there wasn't any need of it so far as this thing is concerned, as you already had the book. But it's damned queer, just the same!"

"I think Gulab Singh is right," said Dorothy Merwood earnestly. "If he has some plan, that is the first consideration."

Glover had taken the book from Kenneth Wayne's hands and was examining it now minutely.

"All right, then, for my part!" he grunted. "Go on, Gulab Singh—tell us what you propose to do."

"Sahib," said Gulab Singh, "we will put up a white flag, and Selim Ali, because of the drawing of the lots, will go down to Malatea and bargain with him. If Malatea will draw off all his men into the little open space down there near where the river enters the hill, so that we may see them all together, and so that we may know they are not lying in wait for us elsewhere, and will promise to let us go, we will give him the book."

"H'm!" commented Glover. "A bit nervy, isn't it?—when he has already got *us* in his power!"

"But the book he has not got, sahib," Gulab Singh answered quickly. "And it is the *Konchi-kan Kitab* of Kana-ee-a that he desires more than all else. And he knows he cannot get the book unless we give it to him, for the book we can destroy before he destroys us—and in that manner Selim Ali will talk with him."

"By Jove!" ejaculated Glover. "You're right there!"

Kenneth Wayne frowned.

"I've no doubt he'd agree, and agree like a flash," he said, "and, to pretend to keep faith, draw all his men together in the opening of the gorge there where we can see them; but after that—what? Once he's got the book he's in just as good a position as ever to do us in. True, we could run a little way farther along the top of this ridge and be no worse off than we are now, but we wouldn't have enough start to get clear away. There's no guarantee that he'll keep faith. Faith!" He laughed harshly. "That man! Good God!"

"Sahib," said Gulab Singh with a strange smile, "I do not say that he is one who loves to keep faith, and yet it may be that having got what he desires so greatly he will ask for nothing more. Does the sahib know of any better thing to do?"

It was Glover who answered.

"No," he said bluntly. "I agree with you, Wayne, that it's a slim chance, but any kind of a chance is better than none. And, as you say yourself, we won't be any worse off anyway, for if they start after us we can take cover again farther on along the ridge. We're not going to walk down into their arms in any case. The idea, as I understand it, would be to keep along the ridge to the other end of the gorge, and take to the woods up there. What do you say, Wayne?"

The frown was still on Kenneth Wayne's face.

"Well, all right!" he said tersely. He took off his white jacket, emptied the pockets, and handed it to Gulab Singh. "Here's your flag. Wave it at them."

Gulab Singh held the jacket up at arm's-length above the ledge of rock, and circled it to and fro in the air. Presently an answering signal, something white, was waved in return from the edge of the woods.

Gulab Singh turned to Selim Ali.

"It is well," he said. "Go now; but see that you speak only face to face with Malatea for his word alone is law."

Selim Ali stood up without comment, stepped out into plain view, and composedly, without haste, began to descend the face of the ridge.

Dorothy Merwood spoke suddenly.

"It—it seems like sending the man to his death," she said in a low, tremulous voice.

Gulab Singh shook his head.

“The Miss Sahib need not fear,” he said. “Selim Ali is safe now because they will say to themselves: ‘Why does he do this thing?’ and afterwards he will be safe too because they will send him back for the *Konchi-kan Kitab*.”

Kenneth Wayne nodded assent.

“Yes, I fancy, as far as that end of it is concerned, he’s safe enough.”

They watched the man descend the ridge, cross the intervening open space beyond, and, passing in amongst the trees, disappear from sight.

There had been no sound—only a sort of breathless silence from all around.

Glover, who still held The Locked Book in his hand, grunted suddenly as he began to examine it again.

“It’s a positive crime to hand this over without getting a look inside!” He was twisting at the dragon’s mouth and tail that held the covers together. “It’s infernally strong, though! Maybe we could prise it apart with a bit of rock.”

“Sahib,” said Gulab Singh, “if the book is opened it cannot be closed again for the metal cannot be joined together, and Malatea will know that it has been opened, and in such case that which Selim Ali has gone to do will be set at naught. It was for the secrets of the *Konchi-kan Kitab* that Malatea came to Salabam. If its secret are known to others, Malatea would destroy those others that their knowledge might die with them. Sahib, would he let us go from here if what is written in the book were written on our memories?”

Glover for a moment more turned the dragon-covered book over in his hands, then, with a shrug of his shoulders, laid it down on the ground beside him.

“No; I don’t suppose he would!” he agreed, with a short laugh. “You’re a queer beggar, Gulab Singh! Deucedly logical in some respects—and equally incomprehensible in others.”

“Yes!” exclaimed Kenneth Wayne suddenly. “And especially the latter! I can understand you taking the book that night, because everybody seems mad to lay their hands on it—but not your subsequent actions.” His voice hardened abruptly. “And I don’t know of any better time, Gulab Singh, for an explanation.”

"It is well, sahib"—Gulab Singh inclined his head gravely—"for the time has indeed come." He looked for a moment from one to the other of the little group around him, but in a strange, introspective way as though he saw none of them. "I have listened to Wayne Sahib's tale," he said, "and it is a strange tale. Truly we travel upon the Wheel, and the Hand of Fate is beyond all comprehension, for my tale is not unlike the sahib's tale, and my tale, too, is strange. Listen, then, sahibs! We were three. I, and Selim Ali, and Lalla Dass—and Lalla Dass was he who was murdered, we know now by the Malays, in the hut at the Cheruchuk River."

"*What!*" Kenneth Wayne almost shouted, as he stared at Gulab Singh. "Say that again! You knew who he was all the time, you——"

"Wait, sahib! There is more before the sahib can understand. And there is something that it is not good for the Miss Sahib to see. Will the Miss Sahib hide her face?"

"That's a strange request!" growled Kenneth Wayne. "This is getting a bit——"

"Let him go on," interposed Dorothy Merwood quietly. "He would not make such a request without good reason, I am sure. I will not look, Gulab Singh!"

"It is only to save the Miss Sahib pain," said Gulab Singh. "Once, as Wayne Sahib knows, I stood naked before him, but there was that which he did not see, because my back was not toward him. Look, then, Wayne Sahib—and look thou, too, O Glover Sahib!" With a deft, quick movement Gulab Singh removed his upper garments and bared his back. "Look!" he cried—and lifted the huge turban from his head.

"My God!" It came in a low, shocked cry from Glover. It was repeated: "My God!"

Kenneth Wayne felt his lips twitch. Mechanically he moved his body to form a screen before Dorothy Merwood that she might not, even inadvertently, see what, hardened as he was, revolted and sickened him. The man's ears were gone—sliced off close to the head. Great gouges out of the flesh, hideous hollows, dull red excoriations criss-crossed the back in a mass of healed scars; there was not an inch but must at one time have been literally mangled by some barbarous and inhuman instrument of torture—a steel whip perhaps.

He turned his head away.

"What's it mean, Gulab Singh?" he cried out.

“Sahib,” said Gulab Singh, as he replaced his clothing and turban, “it was the man that the sahib calls Crimson Sash. But this is little, sahib, very little, and it is in my heart that this perhaps I might have forgiven—but not the other. It is a black tale, sahib—will the sahibs and the Miss Sahib listen?”

“Speak on, Gulab Singh,” said Kenneth Wayne hoarsely. “We listen.”

“In my country, sahibs, I was a merchant and not poor.” Gulab Singh’s face had suddenly lost its impassiveness; it was strained and curiously haggard, the black eyes burning feverishly as though full of some strange unquenchable fire. “I loaded a vessel, and with me was my wife, and a child, sahibs, that was at breast and had not yet known a year. And one night the wind failed us, and we were set upon by this Malatea with his proas, and many were killed—and amongst them the child whose head was severed by the blow of a kris in the hands of Malatea that my wife might know thereafter that he was her master.”

Gulab Singh’s voice had grown thick, almost incoherent. He paused, staring at the ground. He interlaced his fingers and twisted them, and the muscles cracked. There was no other sound.

Kenneth Wayne felt Dorothy Merwood draw closer to him; felt her hand, trembling, creep into his.

“Sahibs, Malatea took my wife, and for a year my wife lived while Malatea mocked me, and then she died. And for five years I, and Selim Ali, and Lalla Dass were slaves in the hidden village of Malatea. So, O sahibs, runs the tale. And one night we stole a proa that lay broken on the shore and made our escape, but we had no water and no food, and the proa scarce held upon the surface of the sea. And we were prepared to die, sahibs, for four days passed, and we were as men who had gone mad. Then a ship came upon us and we were saved. And when the weakness was gone, I asked of the captain of the ship where he had found us, and he showed me on the chart, and I made note of it, because none knew where the hidden village of Malatea was; but I knew then, Wayne Sahib, even in the same way as the sahib’s chart told him, that Malatea was somewhere near that marking on the chart for in our four days the proa had not travelled far. Did I not tell the sahib that our tales wove strangely together?”

“Yes!” said Kenneth Wayne beneath his breath. “Good God! Go on—go on, Gulab Singh!”

Gulab Singh laughed.

Kenneth Wayne started involuntarily. It was the first time he had ever heard the man laugh. Laugh! It wasn't laughter! It was a horrible sound. He felt Dorothy Merwood's hand close convulsively in his.

Gulab Singh reached out suddenly and picked up the dragon-covered book.

"It was in the village of Malatea that I first heard the tale of the *Konchi-kan Kitab* of Kana-ee-a," he said. "And it was there, too, sahibs, that I learned the soul of Malatea, and came to the knowledge that it was a slave to greed above all other things. And so, sahibs, because I could not find Malatea so that I might do to him that which must be done, I fashioned this book so that Malatea should seek it, and in the seeking of it we two should meet."

"You did—what!" Kenneth Wayne ejaculated with a sort of helpless gasp. "You made that book? Is that what you said? You mean it isn't the real thing at all? Just—just *bait*?"

"Even so, sahib," Gulab Singh answered. "But not the book itself—that I did not make. I searched long, a year, sahibs, in the shops where the sahibs' people sell books that I might come upon one that in size and in its looks was like unto the *Konchi-kan Kitab* as the tale described it. But the brass dragon I fashioned, and in the fashioning of the dragon I was another year; and then, sahibs, the *finding* of the *Konchi-kan Kitab* had only to come to Malatea's ears. That is the tale, sahibs."

Glover had jerked himself up on his elbows.

"I'm damned!" he exclaimed. "Well, at least, you're a subtle bird, Gulab Singh! The East and the West, I take it! Wayne goes out bull-headed after his man, and Gulab Singh patiently whistles his game to him. Well"—he laughed shortly—"so far as present results go, I can't see that one method has anything over the other. This Malatea, or Crimson Sash, or whatever you choose to call him, seems to have come out top-dog. And instead of either of you getting him, he's more likely than ever to get us. When he opens that book and, instead of the secrets of this Kana-ee-a, finds he's been hoaxed, we're done brown—to a turn." His voice rasped suddenly. "I don't follow you there, Gulab Singh. You must have gone mad! The last thing in the world to do is to hand that book over to him now as a bribe to let us out of this."

Gulab Singh's face had become imperturbable again, his voice grave and unemotional once more.

“Sahib,” he said, “all that also was in my mind in the fashioning of the book. I did not know in what manner the book might come into the hands of Malatea. It is true that the book does not hold the secrets of Kana-ee-a; but I did not say, sahib, that it did not hold other secrets. How will Malatea say they are not the secrets of Kana-ee-a until he has gone afar in search of them?”

“Oh—right!” exclaimed Glover, with a quick and humble smile. “You win again, Gulab Singh. I’m sorry I spoke! Well, then, go on with your story—you came here to Salabam, just as Wayne did, on account of its location in respect of the positions you both had marked down on your charts.”

“Yes,” added Kenneth Wayne quickly, “there’s a lot that’s far from clear to me—beginning with that night on the Cheruchuk.”

“Sahibs,” Gulab Singh answered, “it was necessary that the finding of the book should be beyond the questioning or the doubt of any man; and it was necessary that in men’s minds there should be no doubt but that it was indeed the *Konchi-kan Kitab* of Kana-ee-a. Sahibs, that a native should find it would be of no avail, for he would hide his secret in his heart that he might profit by it himself, and word of the finding would not spread abroad and reach the ears of Malatea. Also, sahibs, the word of a native was not alone enough, for Malatea is a man of great craftiness and not easily deceived. And so, sahibs, it was arranged between us, between Lalla Dass whom the Malays killed, and Selim Ali, and I, Gulab Singh, that Merwood Sahib, a man of great learning, who had come here to Salabam and desired to visit the interior, should find the book. And all things were prepared in the ruined village on the Cheruchuk. But Merwood Sahib was stricken with a sickness, and you, Wayne Sahib, came, and the Miss Sahib brought you to me. Does the sahib remember that I asked him if he, too, would journey to the Cheruchuk?”

“Yes, I remember,” said Kenneth Wayne tersely.

“Thus, then, was it done, sahibs,” Gulab Singh went on. “That night after Wayne Sahib and the Malays had seen the book, Lalla Dass brought me the book, and I and Lalla Dass hid the stores that the sahib might be forced to return to Salabam quickly; and I hid the book in the sahib’s kit bag that it might be found on the return to Salabam, and the word of its finding leap from mouth to mouth and spread from island to island until it should come to the ears of Malatea. But, sahibs, after Lalla Dass no longer had the book, the Malays of the sahib’s crew, unknown to me, but as Fouché Sahib has related, set upon Lalla Dass for the book and murdered him.”

Gulab Singh paused, and stared for a moment down the face of the ridge.

“It is a tale of many words,” he said without inflexion in his voice; “but Selim Ali does not yet return, and the time is ripe for the telling. Sahibs, the murder of Lalla Dass changed many things. I had made plans with Selim Ali to take the book again by theft as soon as it was shown in Salabam, and before it could be opened, because, sahibs, if it were unopened Malatea’s eagerness would be increased a thousandfold in that none save himself should possess its secrets. And then, as the sahibs know, the Major Sahib took the book and said it should not be opened, and it was well, for then all men knew that the Major Sahib had the book and that it was not opened. And then, sahibs, word came to me of three proas creeping in the evening light along the coast, and we watched, Selim Ali and I, and it was Talamori, and we knew him for a man we had seen in Malatea’s village—but the book was not for Talamori.

“And we feared greatly what Talamori would do, for word of the finding of the book would not be long in reaching his ears; and we feared both for the Major Sahib and the book. Sahibs, we went to the Major Sahib’s house; but I alone did he see enter. I talked to him of the danger and told him he should bring the white men around him lest evil came upon him quickly, but he would not believe—and so, while I talked, Selim Ali stole the book, for only Malatea must have it. Then I took to Wayne Sahib the key of his room, and this I did because when it became known that the book was gone from the Major Sahib and that Wayne Sahib had fled all men would say Wayne Sahib had it, and in the excitement of the search for the white man the news would travel still faster to Malatea’s ears, and Malatea would come the more quickly while he still knew who had the *Konchi-kan Kitab* and before Wayne Sahib could leave the island. And meanwhile, as the sahib knows, I would have hid him. But the sahib would not go. And the evil that I feared came to pass, and the Major Sahib was murdered, and——”

Gulab Singh broke off abruptly. He pointed downward across the ridge to where a single figure, the only one in sight, had suddenly emerged from the trees.

“See!” he said. “It is well! Selim Ali comes. And the tale is almost at an end. The sahib *did* go out, and he was out while the Major Sahib was murdered. And so, sahibs, I took the book and put it in Wayne Sahib’s room because I did not think the sahib would accuse himself of murder by facing the white men with the book, but instead that it would at last make the sahib flee, and I wanted him to flee because of the reasons I have told the sahib, and now I wanted him to flee still more for I feared greatly for the sahib’s

life when the white men and the natives should learn of the murder of Major Sahib and that Wayne Sahib had been out. But while I and Selim Ali watched, there came to Wayne Sahib's room Fouché Sahib and Walters Sahib. Sahibs, we watched the fight, but it was not well that we should be seen if afterwards we would be of help to the sahib, or unless the fight went against the sahib and the book was taken by the other two. And as we watched, Merwood Sahib came with great slowness on crutches along the verandah and——”

“My father!” Dorothy Merwood cried out sharply. “Did you say Merwood Sahib, Gulab Singh?”

“It was even so,” Gulab Singh answered. “Merwood Sahib came at last to the window, and through the window he watched the end of the fight.”

Dorothy Merwood was no longer looking at Gulab Singh—she was staring up into Kenneth Wayne's face, her lips trembling.

“You——” Her voice broke. “That was what you meant when you asked me where my father was, and afterwards spoke about the crutches! You—you saw him!”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne quietly. “I saw him.”

“And—and you thought he had the book when you—you saved us all that night?”

“Dorothy, it doesn't matter now,” Kenneth Wayne answered gently. “See, Selim Ali is here. Let Gulab Singh finish. Go on, Gulab Singh.”

“Yes,” she said in a choked way, “go on, Gulab Singh.”

“The tale is almost at an end,” said Gulab Singh, as Selim Ali's figure appeared above the ledge of rock. “When the lamp went out, Merwood Sahib tried to get into the room, but he fell down and sickness came upon him because of great weakness. And Selim Ali took the book, and I carried Merwood Sahib to his room again and put him in bed. That is all, for the rest is known to the Miss Sahib and the sahibs—except that I would tell Wayne Sahib that it was I, Gulab Singh, who fired the shot at Malatea in the Devil's Throat, for it was the first time in the years that have passed that I had come face to face with Malatea. As the sahib knows, I missed the shot, and I could not fire again because the sahib stood between.”

He turned abruptly to Selim Ali, and for a moment the two spoke rapidly together in their native tongue. And then the great turban nodded a sort of grim assent.

“It is well,” said Gulab Singh in English; “though Malatea showed great anger to find in Selim Ali one who had escaped from him. Look!” He pointed quickly down and across the ridge to the right, where, in the sort of little cup-like hollow formed by the entrance to the gorge, figures, defiling from the trees, were beginning to gather. “Malatea says that he will stand all his men in there that we may see that none are in hiding, even as we said that he must do, and that he will stand amongst them, and that if the book be truly the *Konchi-kan Kitab* of Kana-ee-a, and if when he shall have looked therein that which he reads is indeed the great secret, then he will make signal to us, and we shall go.”

Glover’s face was suddenly hard.

“And if not—if he smells a rat?” he asked grimly. “What then?”

“Then, sahib, we die,” Gulab Singh answered gravely.

“Yes, that’s just it—we die!” Glover laughed a little harshly. “You’re clever, Gulab Singh, I’ll admit that; but you took on a bit of a contract. A book two generations old—changes in the language, and all that! You said this Malatea, or, as Wayne calls him, Crimson Sash, is a man of great craftiness and not easily fooled. I wonder what the odds are—against us?”

“The sahib need have no fear,” Gulab Singh answered as gravely as before. “I was long in the making of the book, and it was made with great care. He will not know. Is it well that Selim Ali should go now with the book? See—they wait!”

“Yes,” said Kenneth Wayne abruptly. “It’s the only chance we’ve got. Let him go!”

Gulab Singh handed the dragon-covered book to Selim Ali.

“Go thou, then, Selim Ali, with whom I have drawn lots,” he said, “and deliver the book into the hands of Malatea, and return.”

“If it is so written, I will return,” Selim Ali answered and, taking the book, began to descend the ridge again.

Gulab Singh stood up.

“They will not fire upon us while Selim Ali goes to them with the book,” he said quietly.

It was a relief to stand up. Kenneth Wayne helped Dorothy Merwood to her feet. Her face was pale, drawn. She stood unsteadily. He put his arm around her, and held her close to him.

She made a brave attempt to smile.

“Kenneth,” she said, “what is the end? Will—will he let us go?”

Kenneth Wayne shook his head.

“I don’t know,” he said. “We might as well face the truth. I am far more afraid of the fiend’s treachery than I am of what Glover seems to fear most—that the book will be unmasked.”

“You mean,” she said, “that he wouldn’t let us go in any case?”

Kenneth Wayne nodded.

“Yes,” he said simply.

A silence fell on the top of the ridge.

Kenneth Wayne’s arm tightened around the girl as he watched the scene below him. And upon him suddenly there came surging a maddening conflict of emotions; a sense of great fear for this woman that he loved; a sense of utter and abysmal futility in all that he had done. His free hand clenched at his side. He felt the blood rush in a sweep of fury to his cheeks. Before his eyes there swam the blood-stained decks of the *Waratan*, the dying men, wantonly murdered, the face of Old Man Wayne—his father. And there, down there, crowded together in that little hollow against the hillside, were the murderers, the same men who had swarmed the decks that night, the same men who had killed at the bidding of Crimson Sash. They were before him at last—but his effort to run them to earth had only brought another life, one grown dearer now to him than his own, into jeopardy. And there, too, was Crimson Sash himself! A lane had opened through the massed figures, and at the end of the lane stood a tall figure in white, and Selim Ali was standing now beside this figure.

Crimson Sash!

And the sight of the man brought added madness to Kenneth Wayne’s brain. He knew! Mad, wild, insane folly to dream for an instant that such a man would let them go! This was the end of his pledge to Old Man Wayne—death. Not his own—that didn’t matter. *Hers!*

He cried out aloud suddenly in his agony.

“What is it, Kenneth?”

He heard her voice, but he did not answer.

He was watching intently now. He saw Selim Ali coming back. At the rear of the massed figures he could still make out the figure of Crimson Sash. The man had something in his hands, seemed to be working with it—and the crowd of Malays were turned with their faces toward Crimson Sash, and were paying no attention to Selim Ali.

And then suddenly a great stillness seemed to fall, as though all nature had ceased to breathe, as though its very pulse had stopped—and then, almost instantaneously, shattering this silence, there came a roaring in Kenneth Wayne's ears, a detonation that seemed to split the eardrums, a terrific explosion, and the ground rocked beneath his feet, and below him a mass of men, a debris of rock and human fragments were flung upward in the air—and he recoiled backward with a strangled cry, and, catching at Dorothy Merwood, hid her face hurriedly on his shoulder.

“Don't look!” he cried out hoarsely. “Don't look! My God, don't look!”

And, holding her, he swept his other hand across his eyes. It was like a charnel house. A few forms ran shrieking from it—but not many. The dead lay there—scattered—grouped—flung about. Bits of rock still rolled down the hillside. A tree, uprooted, tottered and crashed earthward. A pall, greyish-black, rose upward and floated sinuously in the air.

He turned and looked about him, and his eyes held on Gulab Singh. The man was drawn up to his full height, his arms folded across his breast, his eyes under the great, towering turban fixed in a strange brooding expression upon the scene before him.

Kenneth Wayne heard himself cry out in a jerky, unhinged, discordant way:

“In God's name, what is this, Gulab Singh?”

Gulab Singh did not turn his head.

“Sahib,” he answered, and spoke as one aroused from reverie, “it is the secret of the book. For thus it was that I fashioned it for those things that were done to me and to the child and to the woman. Only the edges of the leaves in the book I left, sahib, and in the space, three hand-breadths long and two across, thus made, I placed that which would rend flesh and earth apart when the book was opened. For that which was in the book was an explosive of secret and great strength, sahib, that was given to me by one amongst my own people who is wise beyond other men in such matters; and, even as he said, nothing would remain of him who held the book, and those within a great compass around would also die. And even so it was, sahib;

even as the sahib's eyes have seen. That is all, sahib, for now when the sahib wills, we will go, for the few who live have no strength against us, and their hearts are weak with fear and they flee."

Kenneth Wayne made no answer.

But Gulab Singh seemed to expect none, seemed to be oblivious again of any presence there save his own, for abruptly he flung out both hands and raised them, palms outward, until they were outstretched to full arm's-length above his head. And for a space he stood there in the sunlight, and his face, upturned, seemed in that moment to grow old, and his eyes closed, and only his lips moved.

And suddenly he cried out, and the figure of Selim Ali climbing the ridge stood still with head bent low, for Gulab Singh's cry was in a mighty voice that carried to a far distance:

"It is done, O Malatea! It is done! What is written is written, and thus has it come to pass! It is done, O Malatea—it is done!"

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Locked Book* by Frank L. Packard]