

Red Tree-Frogs

by Elmer Brown Mason

Sequel to "Black Butterflies."

[FOURTEEN years have elapsed since Andy Freeman, Scotchman, naturalist and explorer, bade a reluctant farewell to his old friend and comrade, Trevor Dillingame, and at the command of the amazingly beautiful and savagely cruel priestess, Kratas (backed by her army of beast-men), turned his back upon the mysterious lost Chinese temple hidden deep in the impenetrable and deadly jungles of Borneo, and took up his sad and lonely trek back to civilization—the civilization that Dillingame had bartered forever for the love of his savage goddess. All this was told in "Black Butterflies" (ALL-Story Weekly, June 24, 1916). In this new story you will follow the hardy Scotchman once more into the fetid jungle, where, lured on by the call of the strange red tree-frog, he plunges again into a maelstrom of amazing adventure.—THE EDITOR.]

CHAPTER I. BACK TO BORNEO.

ONCE the jungle has cast its spell over you, once you have sweated to torture in the wet, enervating gloom of its tropic growth, you are lost forever to the world of cities with their dull skies and flat pavements over which stream unceasingly the endless, white-faced throngs. Those who have the jungle in their blood must go back to the jungle, or they will die.

I, Andrew Freeman, a Scotchman and therefore cautious with words, say it.

All may seem to be going well, and then, some night, you wake to the patter of rain outside and it comes back to you: the sappy smell of growing green things, the drip, drip, drip from every overburdened leaf, the great sigh of wind through the trees as though the whole, hot, restless world moved in its sleep. There is no resisting, no escaping. 'Tis the jungle calling back her own, and 'tis best to go then, at once; for sooner or later you *must* heed that call.

There was more than this to lure me from my comfortable berth in the British Museum where, all day, I mounted butterflies and moths that other men had gone to the ends of the earth to secure,

and checks came each month so that, frugal Scotchman that I am, my bank account soared to figures I had never dreamed. In the unexplored wilds of Borneo had not Trevor Dillingame's last words to me been: "Come back—some time. I sha'n't be unhappy here but—come back—some time," when he had bought my life by staying behind to mate with Kratas, priestess of the Land of Blood, and beautiful beyond dreams?

The sable butterfly-wing talisman, emblem of an all-powerful Chinese *tong*, had brought me, with my five beast-men porters, safe through many perils to the coast. The beast-men had faded back into the jungle to return to that strange land where great stores of gold were hidden beneath a temple raised by age-long dead Chinamen, and victims were sacrificed by Kratas (who claimed she would live forever) to "the father of the sable butterflies," a gigantic leech that dwelt in a white-lily bordered pool like to a fair mirror mounted in silver.

Then, for ten years I wandered through the East: Sumatra, Sarawak, Java, New Guinea, collecting birds, beasts and insects. Always I meant to return to Mount Kina Balu and the Land of Blood; always something took me into some other remote corner of the earth, until at last, after

a fearful bout with jungle fever, I found myself in London.

There it seemed natural to slip into my place in the British Museum, and for three years I was content.

The change came in the night. When I woke the wet, gray, London mist was streaming in and a voice from my dreams still echoed through my brain.

"Wake up, for God's sake, Andy, wake up!" it called. "*This place is enchanted!*"

With a rush it came back. Dillingame shaking my shoulder to rouse me against the attack of the beast-men; the velvet darkness lit, here and there, by luminous fungi, the rush for shelter into the jungle. My soul sickened. London roared at me through the open window as though with Homeric laughter. The four walls of my room changed to four walls of a tomb from which I must escape at any cost, escape and flee to where there was space, where there was silence, where the choked jungle hid many things that I must find!

Till morning I roamed the streets, my scant belongings packed for storage, my traveling kit ready; and then walked into my laboratory in the Museum. The grizzled old entomologist for whom I mounted specimens did not raise his head when I entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Freeman," he said. "There are some *hestiae* from Borneo." Then something made him look up. He gazed at me a moment before he spoke.

"Humph! I see. The best *préparateur* we ever had, too. When do you go, and where?"

"Now. British Borneo, Mount Kina Balu and thereabouts."

"Will you wait for a list of the *lepidoptera* we should like to have from there?"

"No. Send it to me at Brunei, care of the Resident," I answered, and turned to go.

"Here's some mail for you."

I took the small, square package he handed me. It had been posted at Brunei, British Borneo, to an address in Sarawak; then followed me all over the world, five, six, seven months on the way. I tore it open hurriedly.

Inside was a scrap of paper and a shriveled, crimson thing, a red tree-frog, the kind that Kratas, the priestess, had brought in from the

swampy coast-jungle as food for the predacious larva of the sable butterflies.

I turned over the slip of paper. There were only a few lines on it.

The red tree-frogs seem to have been wiped out by some epidemic. The black butterfly caterpillars have nearly all died through want of this food. It looks as though this species of papilio might be extinct in another year.

Dillingame

'Twas the sheer, stark obstinacy of the Englishman! He could not write me if he wanted me, needed me, but had to send just such a message so I might read into it what I pleased.

Brunei, principal town of British Borneo, with its twenty thousand inhabitants, looked exactly as it had fourteen years before. I cruised between its nipa-thatched huts built on piles to that rendezvous of adventurers, sea captains, and derelicts, called by its Chinese proprietor the House of Unending Happiness and Delight, and by white men the Devil's Club. I wanted to pick up the gossip of the land, find out where to buy provisions, and especially to learn if anything had been heard from the back country concerning Trevor Dillingame.

At my first innocent question anent supplies I sensed something wrong. In one breath I was informed that porters were not to be had for love or money, that the back country was full of orchid and other collectors, that the natives were very unfriendly!

Of course this was all poppycock. Porters are always to be had, there aren't a dozen collectors in the world who would care to go into the interior of British Borneo, the natives are always as unfriendly as you will let them be, no more so. It was plain I wasn't wanted in the back country, that was the answer, and I could not definitely make up my mind why.

There was nothing to be gained by making known my intentions at this stage of the game, however, and I got into a boat and went to call on the British Resident.

I found him as I had left him, immersed in card indexes—he was fey on indexing everything—and he wasn't pleased to see me.

Trevor Dillingame had chucked him into the water once when he commented on our friendliness with the natives as lowering the white caste throughout the East.

"Where is your friend, Mr. Dillingame?" he asked, after he had indexed my commission from the British Museum and regretfully written me out (and indexed) a collecting permit.

"Somewhere around Mount Kina Balu."

"So I have heard, so I have heard," and he continued pompously. "Several complaints have come to me, Mr. Freeman, in regard to him. Several complaints! It seems he has acquired a pernicious power over the natives in—er—the part of the country where he is. There are some Chinese interests—mining, I believe—in that—er—region, and through his influence the legitimate owners were not allowed to work them. They have complained to me. This will not do at all, Mr. Freeman, not at all! The Chinese are wealthy and influential members of this community. I have listed here several hundred who—" he turned to his beloved card indexes.

I fled.

There is an old, old Chinaman in Brunei, very rich, who used to cash our drafts. and even lent us money on occasion. I went to him for information when we set out with the Portuguese, Gomez, after the sable butterflies, and he had tried to lead me away from my purpose by a typical Oriental trick. Nevertheless I knew he would not actively lie to me, though he would have no scruples, if it suited his interests, about deceiving me. Also I was sure that he was the real head of the *tong*, which bound together all his compatriots in the East.

He came last on my calling list.

When I left Brunei he had been an old, old man, but now he looked like Methuselah. His face was so wrinkled and lined it resembled the closely drawn contour map of very broken country, and his eyes were so sunken that they gleamed out with the glitter of water in the darkness of a deep well. Opium had taken its toll in the shaking of his hands, the nails of which were fully five inches long, a sign of very high caste indeed.

He was just the wee bit dodderly, though, and I could plainly see that his sons did not like my request to talk with him alone. Without preamble I went straight to what I wanted to know—it's

useless to try to match wits with an Oriental.

"Why am I not wanted in the back country, what is happening there?"

"Where is Dillingame, Fleeman?" he parried.

"He's the other side of Kina Balu, as you know."

"You no go to him," the old fellow warned. "He catchum tubble. Gold come evely full moon, then gold no come."

"That's all right," I interrupted, "but it was Gomez murdered the Murut who used to bring out the gold, and also took the black butterfly talisman from him. I have it now," and I showed it. "You can't take gold out of that country without this talisman. Kratas, the priestess, won't let you."

"My savvy, my savvy," the wrinkled Chinaman answered, and then became silent, musing after the fashion of very old men. I not speak. Finally he raised his head.

"You want catchum gold?"

"No."

He nodded as though in confirmation of his thoughts.

"Dillingame, he your flien?"

"Yes."

He nodded again and then began to speak slowly, more to himself than to me.

"Gold: All wantee gold! Never catchum 'nough. My no care, but young man, who rule after my go back China-way to ancestors, he wantee catchum plenty gold. He send. Dillingame no let. Now many go catchum Dillingame, get allee gold."

"Then he's in danger?"

"Yes."

"Look here," I said, "I suppose you have passed one of those *tong* sentences on him. I know you are all-powerful in the *tong*, and I'll give you the choice of two things: either I'll go out with all the men I can muster and fight this expedition that has been sent in to kill Trevor Dillingame, or I'll give you plenty gold, all I've got, a thousand pounds, if you'll guarantee his safety."

The old man sighed.

"My no wantee. You love you' flien?"

"I'll not say no," I answered with Scotch caution.

"My makee save him life, no can do mo'. Only big China climinal, worse kind climinal,

killum fathah" (he shuddered), "sent in there because temple makee curse heap long time."

He rose and moved to the inevitable sandalwood chest that is found in the sanctuary of every rich Chinaman, and, returning with something between his fingers, laid it on my palm. It was a tiny red tree-frog, about the size of a sixpence, and fashioned from some very light metal. While I was examining it he drew brush and ink-pot to him and painted some characters on a fragment of rice paper, signing with the semblance of a butterfly.

"You take. That give Dillingame back life. Now you go, my wantee smoke."

You can't ever thank an Oriental. He doesn't understand it and detests it. I went.

By myself, I wrapped the red tree-frog and precious scrap of paper in oiled silk, cut a hole well up the heel of my boot, and plugged the little package inside.

There wasn't the slightest difficulty in securing porters, that lying proprietor of the Devil's Club notwithstanding, and I got hold of six good men, all of whom had been with me in the jungle before. It was mighty few for the distance I was going, but I armed them well, we could travel very fast, and I knew I should find food when I reached Dillingame at the ruined city of the temple in the Land of Blood.

How quickly the jungle takes one back, and how you hate it and love it at the same time! It was a dry year; that is, it only rained once a day, and the jungle leeches were as bloodthirsty as tigers. There were (as Dillingame had written) desperately few of the little red tree-frogs whose piping sounds like the fresh dash of falling water. I saw only three, all of which I captured as food for the caterpillars of the sable butterflies, should those extraordinary insects yet survive in the Land of Blood.

There were plain traces of a very large expedition having proceeded us, and we followed the trail they had broken. Toward nightfall I always went ahead of my men after we camped, as a precaution.

Day after day the spoor became fresher, and when we were beneath the shadow of Kina Balu, I knew that we were not two hours behind whoever

had gone before. The men pitched camp near a trickle of water, and I walked on for my evening's reconnaissance.

It was unusually hot even for that region. The sun hung like a red copper penny just above the horizon, and it seemed as though it would never sink and let the cool breeze down from the mountain. The air was alive with the flutter of butterflies, and I pushed into the underbrush after a gorgeous yellow and green swallowtail. Reaching high I netted it in air. A dry twig snapped behind me. I swung half round, and a gun-butt crashed down on my head—then oblivion.

I came to slowly, lying on the ground. My ankles were tied together and my hands bound behind my back. I could feel a leech fasten to my middle finger-tip, another was hanging from my cheek. It was a big camp, fifty, seventy-five, possibly a hundred men. Five Chinamen were huddled over a fire, their backs to me.

For a long time I could not realize what had happened, and then I remembered—and boiled. The attack was gratuitous, unprecedented. Strangers in the jungle, especially if they are white, do not fall on a man and bind him hand and foot for no reason at all. It isn't done, it is not according to etiquette!

A Chinaman turned his face from the fire toward me, and the indignant words died on my lips. The face was mutilated horribly, the lips cut away square from the teeth, the ears gone, a black butterfly was tattooed on the forehead, crimson circles around the eyes. Thus do the Chinese mark those of too high rank to be put to death for the most horrible of Oriental crimes, patricide.

The marked man was speaking—and I understand Chinese.

"It must be the other one, and yet I hesitate to kill him. We might force him to guide us to the gold, use him as a decoy for the Englishman, Dillingame."

"Perhaps he can explain that night song," said another, and shivered.

"Let's get him out of the way," suggested a third voice. "They say he is without fear, and he might lead us into an ambush even at the cost of his own life."

"As you will," answered the patricide indifferently, and rising, a knife in his hand,

stepped from the fire. I tried to pray, but all I could think of was the doxology. He failed to see me in the darkness, and called impatiently for a light.

Then he froze in his tracks.

From the jungle came a high, mocking laugh, twice repeated, and then words in the Ida'an tongue, not exactly sung, but chanted, and with studied insolence as though the singer had spat in one's face:

“Tired his feet on the jungle trail,
When shall ye find a place to rest?
Leeches' food when the night is pale.
Would ye sleep on the jungle's breast?
Lianas twining in and out
Weave naked bones around, about
Of those who deemed the jungle free
Free to their steps, men such as ye!”

I glanced at the men near the fire, stricken motionless by fear, and a great thankfulness welled up in my heart. At least Dillingame was warned even if I had to die.

The voice from the darkness was that of his mate, Kratas, priestess of the Land of Blood, the most beautiful thing the jungle held.

CHAPTER II. DILLINGAME.

THE project for my immediate murder did not materialize. The patricide stepped quickly back to the fire, and the five Chinamen were soon deep in a discussion of the weird chant that had come from the jungle. I gathered that this was the fifth consecutive night they had been serenaded.

They were a hard-bitten lot who, according to their own standards, should have been immune from superstition. No one is, however; even I dislike meeting a black cat, especially when it is raining, and you can't force a Welshman to kiss a red-headed girl on a Friday.

They did not in words put down the chant to supernatural origin, and yet, in their inmost souls, they were not sure Kratas's little sandaled feet left no track in the jungle, and things that leave no trail—

It was growing late. There were leeches at each of my finger-tips, so numb now that I could

scarce feel them, and one had crept inside a legging, fastening to my calf.

“What shall we do with that out there?” asked a voice, the man nodding into the darkness in my direction.

“Leave him till morning. His fighting blood should be thinned by then, and we might get something out of him before he dies,” answered the patricide.

Some one else laughed, and they all went to their tents.

A black and white lemur, its round, night-seeing eyes bright as lighthouses, sniffed me from head to foot, and, when I hissed at it, scuttled off into the darkness with piggish grunts of surprise. An ant crawled half into one nostril, and I suffered agonies before it decided to withdraw, walking across my chin down inside my shirt. More leeches came to me.

I debated in my mind whether it would not be easier to end things then and there by yelling until some one came out and killed me. Then I shut my lips firmly; they might only gag me, and no yellow man should ever have the satisfaction of knowing that I was afraid.

I counted fourteen thousand nine hundred sheep jumping over a high stile. A beetle worked into my ear, and the pain was so intense that I could feel myself weeping silently like a little, frightened lassie.

“Freeman, *tuan*,” came a guarded whisper, and I whispered back, “Here!”

One of my Muruts crawled cautiously to me and cut my bonds. For a quarter of an hour I had to lie where I was slowly working back the circulation into my numbed limbs. Then, my hand on his shoulder, we slipped into the jungle.

I found my other five men waiting, ready for the trail, and gloriously excited. These Murut laddies love a fight, and have been great head-hunters in the past. They were anxious to swoop down on the sleeping camp at once and account for as many enemies as possible before disappearing back into the jungle. Also they possessed such unqualified faith in my prowess that they hadn't the slightest fear as to the outcome of any such attack.

I was strongly tempted to make a raid on the tents of the five Chinamen who had so coolly discussed putting me out of the way, but

discretion prevailed, though I *would* have liked to tie them up properly for a little while, and sprinkle a few leeches over them.

Noiselessly we circled the camp and hit the trail up Mount Kina Balu, traveling fast till noon. Then, just beyond a big Ida'an village, the inhabitants of which looked at us askance but offered no hindrance, we lay down among some rocks to the sleep of thoroughly exhausted men.

Night was coming on again when, warned by some sixth sense, I suddenly found myself wide awake. Peering over the rim of rock in the dusk I made out vague figures creeping in from all sides.

Silently I roused my men and put weapons in their hands. Then we waited. There was a long whistle and the Ida'ans came forward in a howling mob. I swung a pump-gun, loaded with small bird-shot, in a half circle, and my men turned loose mostly at the stars. The crowd broke with howls of pain and surprise, scuttling for cover, and we were left alone save for a few figures writhing outside in the semi-darkness.

I wasn't especially alarmed. There was little likelihood of the attack being resumed, and I sincerely hoped none of our antagonists were actually dead. Aside from the fact I dislike killing savages, it would be unpleasant to be stalked by the deceased's relatives on our way back.

Still the situation was not without its elements of danger. I did not know the trail up the mountain well enough in the dark to risk an ambush, and, by morning, if they made a forced march, the Chinese might be upon us.

I couldn't quite account for the Ida'an attack either. We had done them no harm. It must have been the temptation for easy plunder offered by the small size of our party.

In spite of the improbability of a second attack I kept watch all night. Nothing happened, and as the sky was beginning to pale, I caught up a blanket, intending to snatch a few minutes' sleep. Some one Stumbled in the darkness; there was the clink of metal falling upon rock, followed by the flash and staccato report of a rifle.

This time our first volley did not check them. The mechanism of my pump-gun suddenly jammed; the Muruts fired at the sky with much noise but little execution, and several Chinese coolies along with the Ida'ans were on top of us, the fight quickly resolving itself into a series of

individual struggles in which we were outnumbered ten to one.

I caught a Chinaman, whom I had just shot through the head, to my breast, and, using him for a shield, emptied my automatic. A hatchet kept my opponents at bay for a moment, and then the sun popped over the horizon full in my eyes, blinding me. The hatchet was wrenched away and I was dragged down.

There was a whistling singing in the air—the flight of poisoned blow-gun darts—cries of terror, the grip on my throat relaxed. Triumphant as a soaring lark rose a voice:

“Quick is the death born upon wings,
Sings through the air, the upas juice stings
Souls down to hades. . . . Fly, all ye; fly!
Comes She, the priestess, who never may die.
Comes She, the priestess, blood turns to flame
With the hot poison sent in her name.
Scatter and flee, in deep jungle hide,
Food for the leeches, lest worse you betide”

“Andy, Andy, are you all right?” roared Dillingame's voice.

“I'll tell you in a moment,” I called back, heaving the dead coolie off my chest and feeling myself cautiously from head to foot. There seemed to be nothing worse than bruises, and I stood up. Trevor Dillingame was making his way towards me among the dead bodies, but if I hadn't heard his voice I never should have known him.

Most Anglo-Saxons the jungle curses, weakening them with fever, flaying them with malaria till they are the color of gold leaf; but once in a century this same jungle takes a white man to her breast, feeding him the vitality of the teeming earth, cooling his blood with wild fruits, giving him the strength of the great lianas that choke forest trees in their folds.

Trevor Dillingame was this man. His yellow hair, bleached nearly flax-white with the rain and sun, was down about his shoulders that seemed even broader and mightier in their brown nudity than I had remembered them: his arms tapering to slim wrists, and long, sinewy hands were like twisted cables; the muscles in his thighs bulged and played back and forth beneath his skin like a sail bellying to the wind; his whole body was pink brown, and he was nude as Mercury save for a native *sarong* around his waist and buckskins

bound half way up his calves.

But it was his face that caught and held you: the obstinate, full red mouth, the eyes blue as steel, the sweep of silky, flaxen beard that, somehow, did not seem to hide the skin beneath, and over all a look, a stamp, a something that breathed the full-throated, deep-bosomed life of the jungle, the free, wild sweep of wind through the tree-tops, the limitless vitality of every growing thing.

Perhaps the old, pagan wood gods looked that way, but I doubt me were they so bonny.

"You're a mad-looking thing, I managed to gasp. "Where is Kratas?"

"My *wife* is herding the beast-men back into the jungle," he answered, emphasizing the second word. "She does not like you; thinks you have come to take me away. How far behind are those damned Chinks?"

His wife, mind you! A wild woman of the wilderness whom we had watched offer sacrifices of the half-human beast-men to a heathen god in the form of a gigantic leech, beautiful as a dream of paradise, but none the less a savage of the jungle! It was just like Trevor Dillingame; he never did anything by halves. Mated with her that I might go alive from the Land of Blood, and now he took pains to impress upon me that she was to be respected, was to be thought of only as his wife! Losh, but it's a queer world!

And yet I was proud of the man for the very way he looked at it!

"The Chinks, possibly a hundred of them, are near if not here already," I said. "Mrs. Dillingame's mind may be at rest, the jungle has agreed with you too well for me to dream of luring you from it."

Every last one of my Muruts was dead. I gathered together all the fire-arms and ammunition, abandoning nearly everything else. Once over the shoulder of Kina Balu we plunged downward, soon meeting the jungle, and stopped, at last, in a grove of enormous teak trees through which ran a stream, the very place we had been attacked fourteen years before by the beast-men under the leadership of Kratas.

CHAPTER III. THE SON OF KRATAS.

OF course I did not get the entire history of the fourteen years I had been separated from the Englishman all at once. At his best he was not a very communicative laddie, 'twas a part of his obstinacy. Gradually, however, I pieced the story together, and here it is:

After I had been banished from the Land of Blood, the fever again took hold of Dillingame. Kratas and her retinue of old, old women nursed him carefully and, in the intervals, fed all the miserable Chinese coolies who had survived the fight with us, to the gigantic, sacred leech dwelling in the lily-bordered pond before the temple.

Then, of a sudden, the fever left him; he began to mend, and being a live man, reached out for something to occupy his mind.

The thorough exploration of the temple kept him busy for a time, and deep under its foundations he found the great store of gold washed out, by long-dead Chinamen, from the bed of a creek now buried beneath an avalanche.

It did not impress him especially, so he told me, this treasure hoarded up through the ages, grain by grain, only to lie hidden in the heart of the jungle. What really did interest him was the strange architecture of the part of the temple beneath the earth including an ingenious mechanism that I was to learn more about later.

Next he turned his attention to the repair of the stone causeways that threaded the water-soaked jungle, using for this purpose seven Muruts who were allowed to dwell in the Land of Blood. The beast-men were incapable of such labor; indeed they were of the very lowest intelligence, timid, fearful, moving about only during the night, and obeying Kratas alone, whom they feared and reverence in equal parts.

Many months went by and finally Dillingame's soul sickened of the jungle. He made up his mind to escape from the Land of Blood, and took the Muruts into his confidence. Selecting a morning when Kratas was busy with one of the endless temple ceremonials, he slipped away with the Muruts, traveling till late, and then, when nearly to Kina Balu, lay down to rest.

"Hardly had I shut my eyes," so he told the

tale, "when I heard her voice singing. It wasn't exactly singing, either, it was the plaint, infinitely tragic, of a lost soul. The words I can never forget.

"Fold up your petals, every flower
And hide your sweetness, joy is dead.
Sink to the earth, O Birds; this hour
Marks the all end, and hang your head
Red, gold-eyed frog, that piped to me
From out of the tree-top blithesomely."

"I thrust fuel on the fire so it blazed up, and called. Kratas stepped slowly from the darkness within the circle of light. She was nude to the waist, did not even wear the wreaths of jasmine that you will remember always served her as upper garment, and her beautiful, golden body was smeared with ashes.

"Have you come to hail me back to the Land of Blood?" I demanded.

"No," she answered softly.

"Then why did you come?"

"To bid you farewell and wish you happiness."

"Farewell, then," I said, "and happiness to you. O Priestess," and I turned away.

"She continued to stand there, voiceless, proud, and at the same time pitiful.

"Is there anything further?" I snapped. Something inside me had begun to ache.

"Will my lord look upon me," she whispered, "look upon me who am Priestess of the Land of Blood and shall never die, and yet—and yet am a woman?"

"Hand in hand we went through the jungle, and never, since that time, have I been tempted to leave this land.

"I might state, in passing, that though Kratas was gentleness itself to me, every last one of the seven Muruts disappeared and I was wise enough to ask no questions. I noticed, however, that the gigantic leech floated on the surface of the lily bordered pool for several days, always a sign that it had been well fed. There have been no further human sacrifices since that time, however; not even of beast-men, and the sacred leech has had to content itself with an occasional sambur.

"My son was born the month following, and Kratas believes she has transmitted to him her immortality. He has been old enough to hunt with me for several years. Beyond the Land of Blood

there are no other tribes, only the half-human beast-men; but there is game a plenty: rhinoceros, sambur, bear, elephants. Some day I shall capture and tame those elephants so as to use them for rebuilding my causeways."

In regard to the Chinese he told me that a year back, several of them had come into the land under the leadership of a mutilated patricide. They had demanded a tribute of quills of gold which Kratas refused to grant because they did not have the little black butterfly talisman (it being in my possession), and tried to run things generally with a high hand.

Finally Dillingame had a fight with two of them and killed both. The rest were driven out of the Land of Blood up Mount Kina Balu to the Ida'ans, whom they seemed to have corrupted into friendliness.

The present Chinese expedition was no secret, Kratas had been spying on it for days, and it did not especially bother him. He hadn't the slightest doubt that, if it could not be scared away and came to a question of fighting, the beast-men could completely destroy it with their poisoned blow-gun darts.

He was much more concerned over the possible extinction of the black butterflies, since he could not procure the necessary food for their caterpillars, the little, red tree-frogs from the coast, even at an offer of a quill of gold a piece; and he accepted gratefully the three specimens I had taken.

Next morning we followed the stream from the teak grove till we struck a stone causeway of very ancient origin, and, at night fall, reached the low, wet jungle of the Land of Blood. As we passed the temple with the lily-bordered pool in front of it, some one came through the dusk to greet us.

"My son," said Dillingame, and stood back, smiling at my amazement.

I could easily figure the boy was thirteen, or thereabouts, but he looked eighteen if thews and sinews are to be taken into account. Furthermore, he had the best from both his father and mother: the delicacy of her beauty, the strength of his manhood. Losh, but he was wonderful to look upon, a fawn of the Golden Age, so lithe, so

lightly poised upon his well shaped feet that he seemed capable of floating up to the tree tops on the slightest breeze

"Have you taught him English?" I threw in an aside to Dillingame, while the boy's eyes, level with my own, smiled upon me.

"Why should I?" he answered "He knows a few words, but that is all.

Come to think of it, why should he? What was the use of burdening this thing of the jungle, as much a part of the jungle as the birds that flitted through the trees, with a useless tongue?

I remembered Kratas as very beautiful, but the years had somewhat dimmed in my mind her absolute gloriousness, so that its actuality was really a shock. They were a group, that woman, man, and boy, to make a painter gasp and then throw down his brushes in despair at the sheer impossibility of reproducing it on canvas. I should have liked a photograph of them: framed in a wreath of immortels it would have been a handsome thing indeed.

It took some time to persuade the priestess that I had not come to take her Lord Trevor from her, but only to warn of the Chinese expedition and see my friend. Even then she looked on me with suspicion and dislike, and I privately made up my mind to cut my visit as short as possible.

You see I easily realized that my place in Trevor Dillingame's affections had been usurped; twice usurped, making me a bad third to his mate and their son. And it is not a pleasant thing for a man, especially a bachelor getting along in years, to find that a woman has more than taken his place in the heart of a friend.

That night we all slept in Kratas's dwelling, built upon piles above the wet ground; the very place where Gomez had tried to assassinate Trevor Dillingame, and where he met his well deserved end at the hands of the priestess.

Toward morning we were awakened by the chatter of beast-men, and stepping to the open front of the house, looked down upon a crowd of them carrying torches, a very calm Chinaman walking in their midst. Before us they halted and the Oriental spoke up to Kratas, his harangue or rather demands, simple and to the point, namely that all the gold from beneath the temple, together with Dillingame's head, be brought to the teak grove between the next two suns.

The sheer audacity of his request rather took our breath away. Then Kratas, her knife bared, jumped lightly to the ground before we could hinder her. The Chinaman did not move a muscle save to draw one hand from his sleeve holding out to her the black butterfly talisman of which I had been robbed.

For a breath she hesitated, just long enough for Trevor to reach her side, and there they confronted him, beautiful woman and her no less beautiful mate. Dillingame, silencing her with a gesture, spoke:

"Gold you shall not have. As for my head it is yours when you come and get it. Send no more messengers into the Land of Blood, others might not return. Now, get you back to your people, thanking your sainted ancestors that you are yet alive!"

Stepping forward he snatched the black butterfly talisman and flung it out into the darkness.

"We give you between two suns," the Chinaman said imperturbably to Kratas, ignoring the Englishman entirely, and strode away into the night.

"It seems to me that you are not taking this matter seriously enough," I told Dillingame. "They wouldn't go to the expense of sending in an expedition of a hundred men unless they meant business. Besides it certainly had a bad effect on the beast-men. I could see it, this bearding of you in your—er—this insulting of you before them. It would have been better to tie up that nervy individual for a time and give him a scare." (I remembered how the Chinamen had treated me.)

"Nonsense," answered Trevor obstinately, "we'll shivaree them all over the country tomorrow night. The beast-men don't like me, but they obey Kratas implicitly."

"Have it your own way," I grumbled, "but I misdoubt me no good will come of it."

Kratas and her son were up and away with the dawn. Almost at once the little, misshapen beast-men with their odd, hopping gait, began to arrive before the temple, and, chattering to one another, milled about nervously beneath Dillingame's and my scrutiny.

"Queer swine," he commented. "There must be a couple of thousand of them hidden back in the jungle. They hunt, eat, sleep, and attend the

temple ceremonials, and that is their life.”

All morning we watched them assembling, and toward noon Kratas walked into their midst with her retinue of old, old women, and leading a sambur buck.

“Listen, now, and you will hear something worth while,” whispered Dillingame. “It’s the rallying song.”

There was a hushed silence and the voice of the priestess rose, silvery, clear:

‘A jungle breeze sighed to the *angusta* tree,
 ‘Where are the orang-utans*, where can they be?’
 The *angusta* tree bowed to the jungle breeze
 While answered in chorus all the trees:
 ‘Under the palm leaves,
 Down by the pool,
 Deep in the jungle,
 Where the winds blow cool,
 Here, there, and everywhere,
 That’s where they be!’
 Are the orang-utans ready?’ (*crescendo*)
 “Ready are we!”

chanted all the beast-men in a crashing chorus.

““Their priestess is calling,’ the jungle breeze spoke, ‘Calling to save them from a tyrant’s yoke. Will they obey her, still remain free?’ Answered in chorus each nodding tree:

‘Naught do they fear
 The wide wilds hold,
 When she is near
 Beat their hearts bold
 Always unconquered
 They will live free.’
 She will they follow?’ (*crescendo*)
 “Follow will we!”

came from every beast-man’s throat.

The sambur was driven into the lily bordered pool, the gigantic leech came to the surface, fastened to its prey, and sank beneath the waters that grew slowly red.

“We bring fear, O orang-utan, to those who dare the jungle,” cried out Kratas. “Follow your priestess, who lives forever who cannot die,” and the whole assemblage melted up the causeway out of sight.

“They plan to reach the teak-grove only at midnight since they have first to collect a lot of luminous fungi,” Dillingame informed me. “Suppose we go on ahead and spy out the Chinese camp before it gets dark. I know a short-cut.”

I won’t soon forget that short-cut. It may have seemed a legitimate road of travel to him dressed, or, rather, undressed as he was; but it wasn’t an easy matter, or cool, for me to go through the very heart of the jungle.

At any rate it brought us to the banks of the stream running through the teak-grove, and there we mounted, by pegs driven into the bark, to the top of a gigantic tree, whence we could look down upon the camp.

All was activity there. The packs had been arranged in a great circle to serve as a partial defense, and a barrier of saplings, with their leaves still on, was being rapidly raised as a screen for what was happening behind. Two poles, driven in the ground about thirty feet apart, were connected with a wire from which hung, in loose, crinkly folds, some kind of a paper contraption of brilliant colors.

We speculated at length, but in vain, as to what it could be before it was hidden behind a screen of leaves. Dillingame had at once recognized the patricide as the same Chinaman he had driven from the Land of Blood a year before, and this discovery evidently made him rather nervous.

“That Johnnie knows all about the country,” he complained, “and got quite chummy with some of the beast-men, rather made a study of them.”

Night came and the camp beneath us apparently went peacefully to sleep. Here and there winked a tiny brazier, the kind Chinamen always carry along no matter where they go, but no camp fires were lit.

I ensconced myself comfortably in a crotch to wait. Trevor climbed down the tree to prospect around, as he called it. A little, spotted owl fluttered to a limb above me and glared down vindictively.

Then I went to sleep.

Dillingame woke me. The full moon flooded the camp with that deceptive radiance which looks like light, but really is very far from it.

“The beast-men are all posted and Kratas and my son are here,” he whispered. “Better come to

* Wild men, i.e. beast-men.

the ground and see the fun.”

Not a leaf stirred when I reached the forest floor, the jungle might have been entirely empty of men for all I could see of them, and yet I knew that more than a thousand were concealed all about me. Finally I made out Kratas, the boy by her side. And just as I located them she began to sing:

“Tired feet on the jungle trail,
When shall ye find a place to rest?
Leeches’ food when the night is pale,
Would ye sleep on the jungle’s breast?
Watch the witch-fire softly glow,
Heed my warning, quickly go
Whence ye came; unless ye do,
The jungle grass shall grow o’er you!”
“. . . unless ye do,
The jungle grass shall grow o’er you!”

thundered out the beast-men, and were as suddenly silent.

Not a sound came from the camp, and there was no perceptible movement behind the screen of leafy saplings.

“They don’t seem to scare,” I whispered to Dillingame.

“Huh!” was his only answer.

Kratas raised her hands, trumpetwise, to her lips, and gave the shrill whistle of a soaring kite. Instantly the air was full of the luminous fungi hurled toward the camp. And there was a prompt answer, the crashing volley of a hundred-rifles.

Twigs rained down on us from overhead as the bullets whined through the trees, but one, at least, found its billet I saw Dillingame’s son stagger and clutch at his throat.

Kratas threw her arm around him with a cry of mingled fury and anguish, and I was by her side. A shot had drilled clean through the boy’s neck and he was bleeding profusely.

From the camp came a shower of rockets, followed by the most deafening din I have ever listened to: drums, rattles, the blaring bray of enormous Chinese horns, and it all ceased as quickly as it had begun. A paper snake unwound its green length in the sky, lit from within, and then vanished in a puff of fire; hideously painted birds and beasts rocked in the air; and then, rising slowly, fully thirty feet long, a gold-and-red dragon with flaming, crimson jaws and silver

crest, floated up toward the tree tops, while the jungle all about us became alive with rustlings.

“Shoot, shoot, O orang-utans! shrieked Kratas. “Kill! Kill! Let not one yellow dog escape!”

But there was no answering flight of poisoned darts in obedience to her command. The beast-men had fled.

Another volley cut the underbrush about us. I plugged the boy’s wounds with some soft grass and, half walking, half carried between the priestess and Dillingame, we hauled him through the jungle toward the Land of Blood.

CHAPTER IV. THE ATTACK.

NOT a beast-man did we encounter during the long night journey. Instead of going to Kratas’s hut, Dillingame led us straight to the temple. You see, the palm-thatched house would not have offered the slightest protection against bullets, but the temple was a different matter.

An immense, pagoda-like structure, it was built of solid blocks of stone so large that it did not seem possible they could have been raised by human hands without the aid of machinery. There were three great stories, each about forty feet high, the topmost crowned with a single enormous block of glittering stone.

Strange beasts were carved on the overhanging balconies, and placques of metal hung down in clusters, tinkling musically to the breeze. In every cranny where it could gain a foothold grew tropical vegetation, but even its tremendous rending power had failed to move a single block of this astounding edifice.

A square portico gave entrance to the ground floor, which was nothing more than a bare room of solid blocks of stone with a small aperture in the middle of the ceiling admitting to the story above. A bamboo ladder led up to this orifice and could, of course, be easily removed. The weaknesses of the second story for defense were its sides, open save for split-bamboo curtains, and the height of only forty feet from the ground making it an easy matter, against but four defenders, for a large force to carry it through the medium of ladders.

The third story was also reached by a hole in the middle of the ceiling and its eighty feet of height precluded a ladder attack. It was there, early in the morning we established ourselves, and spent half the day hauling up ammunition, food, and water.

Kratas had no eyes or ears for anything but her son. The boy was getting along nicely, sleeping soundly from exhaustion, and without a particle of fever. Still it was obvious that, with two holes in his neck, he certainly would bear watching. His mother crouched by his side, motionless, silent, statue of immobility save for the fire that blazed in her eyes.

We took the simple precautions necessary for defense, and then I turned to Dillingame.

"Seems to me we are in a pretty bad fix," I suggested. "We will be starved out of here, or driven out by thirst, in a few days, if nothing worse happens to us. Wouldn't it be more sensible to give up the gold—which neither of us wants—and take to the jungle?"

"And throw in my head for good measure," he added crossly.

"I've attended to your head," I answered, nettled, "though I doubt me you would be just as well off without it," and I pried the little, oiled silk package containing the small, red, metal tree-frog and scrap of Chinese-inscribed rice-paper from the heel of my boot. To my explanation of its significance the Englishman only vouchsafed a grunt, stuck it in a fold of his *sarong*, and bade me follow him.

Once the walls of the third story had been painted with brilliantly colored reproductions of Chinese ceremonials in which a figure of Buddha was carried through endless jungle adventures. The paint had mostly flaked away, but one spot, depicting several Orientals kneeling before a gigantic red tree-frog with golden eyes protruding from its head, was still comparatively fresh.

Against one of these protruding eyes Dillingame pressed firmly and a four-foot-thick slab of rock as high as my head swung noiselessly inward, revealing a flight of descending stone steps. A blast of air, fetid and damp, blew from this aperture, but *blew*, nevertheless, showing it was safe to enter; one could breathe.

"How did you discover this?" I demanded.

"I'll tell you about it when we have seen it

all," he answered.

We went down a very dark, spiral stairway to emerge in what, by the light of my electric torch, proved to be a large chamber.

"We are now under the temple foundations," Dillingame volunteered, and led to the right. A passage opened into a corridor some eight feet square, the walls of which grew wetter and the air more oppressive as we advanced. It ended at a blank wall formed of two blocks of stone between which water slowly oozed.

"This is beneath the very center of the leech pond in front of the temple," my companion announced. "I bring you here so you may more easily understand the rest," and he turned to retrace his steps.

We went past the entrance to the chamber by which we had come in, straight down this strange corridor, the air growing better with every step, and the floor now quite dry. A gleam of light, like a very small, dim star, appeared in the distance, and the tunnel suddenly contracted. And this contraction was caused by hundreds of two-foot-long cocoon-husk bags, each one sealed with red wax in the shape of a tree-frog, and each one filled with gold—there was more of the precious metal in that one place than in many a government mint.

"Losh!" I exclaimed. "Losh, but you're a rich man, Dillingame!"

He laughed and led on without as much as a glance at the treasure, turning to the left just where the piles of sacks came to an end. There was a four-foot square side-room, and my flashlight, playing into it, revealed two enormous bronze levers.

"This," said Dillingame, laying his hand on it, "opens the very bottom of the lily-bottomed pool in front of the temple, so that the entire volume of water rushes down the passage-way we have just traveled. The other lever opens up the floor beneath the gold and precipitates it into the lower drain—for the whole thing is nothing more than a drainage system for the rice fields that were formerly cultivated between the stone causeways—and the water sweeps into the second drain, which empties into a swift-flowing river some two miles away.

"You see, it is possible, at one and the same time, to scatter the gold over half of Borneo and

block the upper end of the underground passages with a solid wall of water.

"There is another entrance under Kratas's hut, and an exit a mile away in the jungle, where the tunnel ends at a small stone house, the hiding-place of the gold before Kratas moved it here. This stone house the Chinamen probably know of, so I have, by removing a block of stone, made another way out, leading into the jungle within sight of the temple."

"Are you sure the levers will work?" I asked.

"Tried them less than a year ago. Carried the gold back in the passage, opened up the place on which it is now piled, and emptied half the pond."

"Is there any secret in regard to how you found out about this, to say the least, unusual mechanism?"

"None at all," he answered promptly. "Kratas showed it to me. Let's go back and see how the boy is. Besides the Chinks should be turning up very soon."

We walked past the treasure, turned into the large chamber, and climbed the spiral stairway. The block of stone swung noiselessly open to pressure on the golden eye of a tree-frog painted on the inside wall (identical with the one painted on the outside), and we stepped into the third story.

A very pretty picture greeted us. The boy's eyes were open, his splendid young body relaxed, and he was smiling up at his beautiful savage mother who was crooning over him:

"Awake, little godling, to sunshine awake!
The parrots are talking, and out on the lake
The wild ducks are feeding, while through the
soft air
The swallows go swooping—sunshine everywhere!
Awake, little godling,
Sweet godling of mine,
To the treasures of daytime.
To joy and sunshine."

Late afternoon came before there was any sign of the Chinese expedition. Then there was the sound of a trumpet, followed by the crash of what the Orientals are pleased to call musical instruments. Far up a causeway we could see them advancing, a great, green paper dragon born at the head of the column. They halted in the distance, and a single man, a white flag in his hand,

advanced toward the temple.

"Go down and meet him, Andy," Dillingame directed, "and play for time. As soon as the boy is fit for the jungle, we'll go where the beast-men are and rally them. But play for time now."

It was the same imperturbable Chinaman who had delivered the first message, and he greeted me in perfect English.

"Mr. Freeman, I believe? You must excuse me for saying that you are in bad company. I have come to deliver an ultimatum that it will be well for you to heed. We will give you twenty-four hours to surrender the gold, not a second more; and Mr. Dillingame must be in our hands within that time, dead or alive."

"Suppose we resist?" I suggested, trying to simulate uncertainty.

"It would be madness. What could two men, a woman, and a boy do against a hundred? For you must realize that the beast-men have been too badly scared to attack us again. I might also call to your attention the fact that the gold rightly belongs to us.

"Also, it will be much to your personal advantage to see that we get it—and Dillingame. If there is no resistance I shall make a point of seeing that you receive your share of the treasure. You may have Kratas, too, if you want her, though I rather had my eye upon her myself." (He licked his lips.) "If there is resistance, you will die with the others."

I'm afraid I'm no diplomat. I had fully intended to temporize, to try and gain time; but the double insult in the bribe was more than I could endure.

"You yellow cur," I hissed. "I'll see you in the hottest depths of hell before you have as much as a sight of the gold! As for Dillingame, come and get him!" And, trembling with rage, I turned my back, striding toward the temple. The third step I stumbled and nearly fell, and it was well I did. A bullet whistled through my hair, the Chinaman crying out triumphantly "One less enemy for the *tong!*"

A rifle popped from the third story of the temple, and I turned to see my assailant running swiftly up the causeway, his left wrist, from which blood was dripping, held in his right hand.

Safe in the temple (I pulled up the ladders as I mounted each successive story) rather

shamefacedly I told what had happened. Dillingame only laughed.

"It's just as well to know they are going to attack," he said, "because I haven't the slightest doubt they would have done so anyway, in spite of the alleged twenty-four hours' truce. We'll hide Kratas and son under the temple, and see what they have up their sleeves. If worst comes to the worst we can always escape into the jungle."

The priestess and boy were banished through the secret passage, the woman carrying her boy without the slightest difficulty; and, lying flat on the ornate balconies, we kept a sharp lookout

It was dusk before anything happened. Then a coolie tried to steal across the open space into the temple. He died half way.

For a time all was quiet, and then a volley came from the edge of the jungle, the bullets whistling above our heads and flattening on the ceiling. Evidently the Chinese were figuring on a lucky shot ricocheting down on us.

Night came, and again a coolie tried to reach the entrance, carrying a load of wood on his head for protection. It cost three shells to stop him, the darkness making uncertain shooting. There was an uproar at the other side of the temple, and we rushed across to the opposite balcony, but could see nothing.

"A ruse," called out Trevor with an oath, and we hurried back to our former positions. A ruse it proved to be. The open space below us was full of Chinamen hurrying into the temple with great bundles of wood on their heads. We shot hard and fast, but few fell. In a moment the place was bare, and another volley came whistling over our heads. Dillingame gave a cry of pain, half anger.

"Did they get you?" I called anxiously

"Only a scratch," he growled and stood up, revealing a bleeding cheek across which a bullet had torn a ragged furrow.

There was a smell of burning in the air, and smoke began to eddy through the hole in the center of the room. I rushed to it, and a bullet whizzed up past my head.

"We're fools," bitterly exclaimed Trevor. "We've let them reach the second story. They can haul up fuel without danger from us, and smoke us out like rats in a hole."

The smoke grew denser, and the stone floor beneath our feet got uncomfortably warm. I tossed

a handful of cartridges down into the fire, and they exploded in a chorus of yells of pain. A tongue of flame licked up into sight. The heat became unbearable.

"Best get out while we can," Dillingame suggested, and crossing over to the painted red tree-frog, pressed the golden eye. I scattered some shells on the floor to explode when it became hotter, so the Chinamen would think us still there, and followed down the secret stairway.

Gasping for breath between the heated walls we reached the square chamber, scurried into the corridor past the sacks of gold, and stopped before the little recess that held the bronze levers. Kratas was crouching there in the dark crooning over her boy. As my flash-light picked her out of the blackness, she held out her arms in an adorable gesture.

"All goes well with him, our son, my Lord Tre-vor," she said.

Dillingame stepped quickly to her into the circle of light, and her eyes fell upon his bleeding cheek.

Never have I seen a face change from all softness to such absolute fury!

"They dared, they *dared*, spawns of unclean fathers, lusters after yellow dust!" she shrieked; "they dared to harm my Lord Tre-vor as well as our son!"

Again she shrieked, and foam came to her lips.

"I go to rally the orang-utans. The kites shall feed full and the lizards play between bare ribs picked clean!"

Dillingame raised his hand to stay her, but I spoke quickly:

"Let her go. We are in pretty desperate case. The sooner the beast-men appear the better."

Kratas slipped out into the darkness of the jungle through the exit the Englishman had made; then the three of us—Trevor, his son, and I—went farther along the rock tunnel, coming out finally in the little stone house where the gold had formerly been stored. The boy, thanks to his wonderful vitality, was perfectly able to walk, and, indeed, his wounds had already closed, so we felt no compunction in leaving him there to recuperate more quickly than in the fetid air underground.

Hardly had the revolving stone that

readmitted us to the tunnel closed behind us when there was a roar of voices from outside dominated by a sharp command in Chinese:

“Don’t kill him! We’ll hold him for ransom against the gold.”

As quickly as two big men can move we were back again in the stone house, only to find it empty. Through the door we saw some thirty Chinamen, the boy in their midst, defiling into the jungle; and I caught Dillingame around the waist just in time to keep him from plunging after them.

“Think, think, you fool!” I managed to gasp, as he struggled with me. “There is no chance of rescuing him; you’ll only get yourself killed, and we can buy him back.”

For a wonder common sense prevailed over his usual obstinacy, and he heeded me. Back in the tunnel, we planned, and planned in vain, what was best to do. Then, in a flash, the whole thing came to me; a desperate expedient it is true, but a possible one should all go well.

“Look here,” I demanded, “when will Kratas be back with, or without, the beast-men?”

“Not later than to-morrow, dusk.”

“Have you lost that little red-metal tree-frog and the scrap of paper I gave you?”

He fumbled in the folds of his *sarong* and produced them.

“Very well. Now listen carefully,” and I proceeded to outline my plan. The next afternoon, as soon as we spied the five head Chinamen together, Dillingame was to walk boldly into camp and give himself up, trusting his life to the tree-frog and the scrap of paper. In return for the release of the boy he was to offer to lead them to the treasure. Were the boy freed, he was actually to fulfil this promise, and, furthermore, let them carry off the gold.

He opened, his lips to protest at this point, but I swept on.

Should they play false and still hold his son, he was to lead them to the treasure anyway, through the entrance beneath Kratas’s house, as many of them as he could get to follow him. When they came to the gold he was to dash ahead past it, and then I would first pull the lever that opened up a gulf beneath the sacks into the drain below; next the one that would precipitate the water of the pond into the corridor, sweeping all before it through the lower drain to the swift river,

two miles away.

Then we should have to trust to luck, and Kratas’s success in collecting the beast-men, for freeing the boy. But at the worst, some of our enemies would be out of the way.

Desperate and as improbable of accomplishment as this plan seemed, we could think of no better, and on it, perforce, we finally agreed.

There was a long wait before us, and to fill in the time, under the guidance of the Englishman, we stole through the jungle within sight of the temple.

What time had failed to accomplish in many years, fire had brought about in a few hours. The upper story had fallen in, and even from afar we could see that many of the immense blocks had split apart from the heat. The Chinese camp was pitched around the smoking ruins.

CHAPTER V. THE PATRICIDE.

CAME at last the evening of the next day, and there was no sign of Kratas. Together we made our way toward the temple, and waited within the edge of the jungle until the five head Chinamen were together. Then Dillingame walked calmly across the open.

I saw him show the red tree-frog and scrap of paper, saw them bend over it, then made my way back, into the tunnel.

Time seemed to stretch out into countless ages as I sat in the darkness, my hands on the bronze levers. Surely a day must have passed! Something must have gone wrong! I became parched with thirst. Then it must be another day, I told myself, and speculated on how much longer I could live without water. Men had gone for a week, I remembered reading somewhere. There was a faint sound from the corridor. It grew nearer, increased in volume, resolved itself into many footsteps.

“We’ll be there in a moment,” spoke Dillingame’s voice.

“I told you to keep silent,” came an answer, followed by the sharp snap of a fist striking on bare flesh.

“Pull the levers, Andy, pull, pull!” shouted

Trevor, and there was the sound of bodies dragging past me in the darkness.

I threw my weight against the levers, snapped on my electric torch, and, gun in hand, bounded into the corridor. There was a crash as the heavy bags of gold went down into the lower drain, cries, shrieks, the roar of the coming water driving the air before it. Dillingame was struggling on the ground, each wrist bound to, that of a Chinaman. I fired into the face of the patricide and ground the head of the other, the cool messenger, beneath my heel.

"Don't kill him," gasped the Englishman "My son is bound in his tent, and I want to repay the blow he struck me when I was helpless."

I slashed away the cords from his wrists, and tying the surviving Chinaman's hands behind his back, we drove him before us. Kratas's voice greeted us at the exit.

"Is all well with my Lord Tre-vor?" she queried anxiously.

"Yes, yes," he responded impatiently. "Are any of the beast-men with you?"

"All of them," she answered simply.

"Quick, to the temple then!" he commanded. "The leaders are dead, save this bound one, and we have only to deal with coolies, but who hold our son captive."

Not a sound betrayed our presence, as the beast-men were stationed around the camp. At a signal the luminous fungi were hurled, and the place became light as day. The terrified coolies sprang from their sleep, only to fall before the deadly blow-gun darts.

"Why butcher all of them?" I called to the Englishman. And he answered: "I'll find Kratas and put an end to it. The beast-men will not obey me."

But Kratas was not to be found and, furthermore, neither was our prisoner. He had escaped, bound as he was, in the confusion. Once I thought I saw him trying to rally the coolies, and then he was lost again.

I'll draw a veil over the rest of that night: the writhing figures on the ground, the shrieks of some poor wretch who had reached the protection of the jungle, only to fall into the hands of the beast-men.

Till morning the butchery—it could not be called a fight—went on, and through the hours I searched in vain for Kratas. Dawn broke over the silent camp, and then, nearly at my side, wailed out her voice

"Where are they who greeted the sun,
So many, so proudly, last day begun?
Where are they, where are they?"

"Where are they who dared the jungle shade.
Came to the Land of Blood, bold, unafraid?
Where are they, where are they?"

"The kite whistles high in the morning sky,
'Come to the feast, brothers,' his cry.
Where are they, where are they?
"The worm thrusts his head from the jungle mold.
What does he mouth, so stark and cold?
Where are they, where are they?"

"Gone where the evil spirits play,
Gone where their food is molten clay,
And there is no drink—gone, gone are they!
Gone to the last one, with break of day,
Gone, all gone, are they, are they."

It was a dreary scene the sun rose upon, and in harmony the storm-clouds banked high in the west. The ruins of the temple still smoked, the pond before it was empty of water, and in its slime writhed the gigantic leech, an obscene, horrible thing to bare to the light of day. Dead men were everywhere.

Kratas stood with her hand on her son's shoulder, and Dillingame and I rocked on our feet with weariness.

"Let us go hence," said the priestess. "I am sick of the smell of death."

"Yes. Let us go back to the house—if it has not been burned down," said Dillingame and we turned. I yanked out my automatic, but not in time. The escaped Chinaman lowered his smoking pistol as Kratas fell into my arms.

"Give me your gun," gasped Dillingame, snatching it from me, and ran forward in zigzags, the muzzle of the Chinaman's weapon steadily following him.

Once the Oriental fired and, staggering, Trevor sprang aside; a second time he pulled trigger, missed. Then with an inarticulate roar of rage the Englishman had him between his hands.

Catching his throat and middle he whirled him high in the air, brought him down across his knee, and I could hear the bones snap. Again above his head he hurled from him the broken-backed thing into the slime of the empty pool where groveled the loathsome leech.

"Come to me, my Lord Tre-vor," cried Kratas, her voice growing weaker at every word. In his arms she gave a little sigh of content and turned her face against his shoulder.

"My lord knows that I—that I—priestess of the Land of Blood—can—cannot—die." But I—am—very—weary—and—would—rest—against—his—heart."

There was a blinding flash of lightning, the crash of thunder, and the rain came! I followed Dillingame, his dead mate in his arms, to the house in which they had so long dwelt. There he laid her on a bamboo couch and knelt by her side. For hours he neither moved nor took his eyes from her face. Once I touched him on the shoulder and said: "You had better lie down and rest, old man." But he shook off my hand. Once the boy screamed out aloud, and I hushed him gently.

Dillingame neither heard nor saw. Outside the lightning flashed and the thunder shook the heavens, while water fell in such torrents as I have never dreamed.

The rain ceased, the clouds fled, the whole world gleamed fresh, clean, full of sunshine, beautiful as it only is after a tropic storm.

Dillingame gathered his mate into his arms and smiled at me.

"She is very cold," he said. "We must take her out into the warm sunshine."

I followed him to the temple, knowing neither what to do or say.

The water was level with the causeways, and running furiously into the pond, now brimming full, its center a whirlpool where it sank into the tunnel.

Dillingame paused on its brim and turned to the boy.

"Child of the jungle, go back to the jungle," he said gently, and reaching out, touched his son's arm with that awkward caress man offers to man.

"Andy, you are a good friend," he flung over his shoulder, and stepped into the flood.

"What are you doing, Trevor?" I shouted. "Come back here!" But the water had caught him, whirled him about.

I saw his arms tighten around his beautiful, dead jungle mate, and the whirlpool sucked them down, to be borne in the clean, brown water to the river that flowed swiftly no man knows where.

The boy and I lived together in Kratas's house for a week. Then he was gone into the jungle all one day. He came back in the evening and handed me the black butterfly talisman that Dillingame had snatched from the Chinese messenger and flung away. A beast-man had found it and given it to him.

The next day and the next he was off in the wilderness, and when he returned he did not weep over the empty house as he had other nights, but told me a strange tale of an elephant with a broad gold band beneath its belly.

Dillingame's son was beginning to forget. At first it hurt me horribly, and then I suddenly realized that he wasn't a man, in spite of his splendid body, wasn't even a boy, just a twelve or thirteen-year-old child.

The next time he was gone a full week, and came back with more jungle tales, also wreathed in jasmine garlands, such as Kratas had worn. I said good-by to him then. He was divided in mind between sorrow at losing me and anxiety to be on the trail of a white sambur which the beast-men had told him about.

On the ship that bore me back to England, to my place in the British Museum where I should for the rest of my days contentedly mount butterflies that other men had gone to the ends of the earth to take, I thought a great deal. Then one night I took the black butterfly talisman and dropped it over the side into the sea. Without it there would be little chance for any man to reach the Land of Blood; certainly should one by some miracle attain it, there would be none at all of ever leaving it alive.