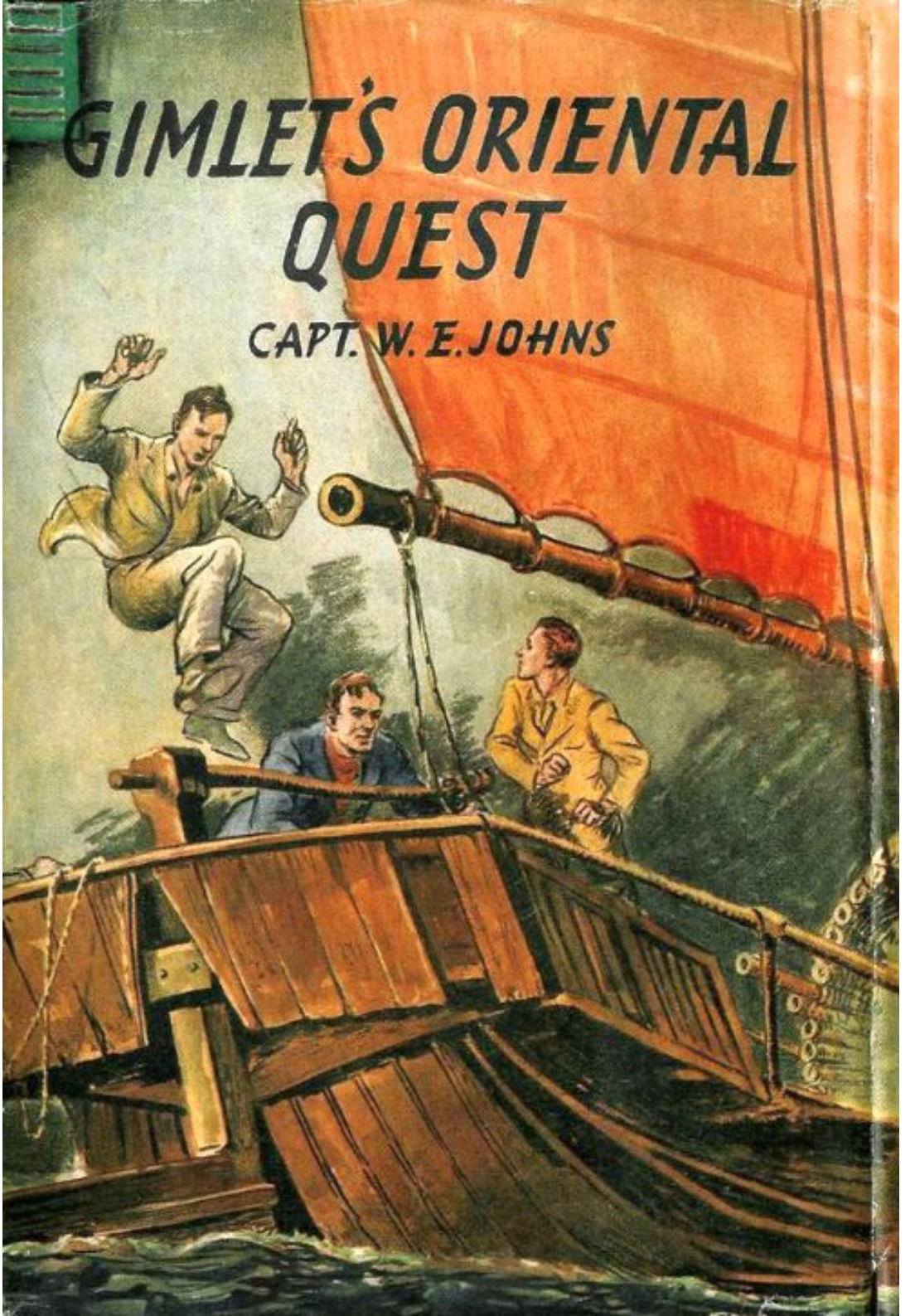
GIMLET'S ORIENTAL QUEST

CAPT. W. E. JOHNS



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“Keep still everybody,” said Gimlet

GIMLET'S ORIENTAL QUEST

A "King of the Commandos" Adventure

By

CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

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The characters in this book are entirely imaginary,
and have no relation to any living person.

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CHAPTER I

HIGHLAND INTERLUDE

THE day was hot. An August sun, with the sky to itself and its zenith passed, loitered lazily along its timeless track towards the towering contours of the Cromdale Hills, already purple with heather, their feet in the hurrying waters of the River Carglas, new-born in the shrinking snows of Ben Macdhui. In short, the day, even as cloudless days go in the crystal atmosphere of the Scottish Highlands, was perfect—perfect, that is, for everyone except those who plied their fishing rods along the river's rockbound banks in the hope of tempting a salmon to its doom.

Nigel Norman Peters, sometime known as "Cub" to the rank and file of the commando unit called "King's Kittens", had given it up. No fish, not even the foolish one that is said to linger in every river, could be expected to rise under such a sun and in water so clear that the shadow of the line fell across the bed of the stream like a hawser. But he was satisfied just to sit and watch the living water. It was enough. The capture of a fish was a desirable but not essential complement to happiness. So, with rod and gaff lying beside the wrappings of a sandwich lunch, he reclined within the shade of an alder and from under the brim of his hat watched the water swirling past, foaming as it dodged the boulders that sought to check its headlong rush to the sea. Silver gleamed as a fish jumped, on its way to the spawning beds at the headwaters of the river. Cub watched it jump again in the neck of the pool, yawned, and refusing to be tempted into futile action, stretched five feet eight inches of lithe figure a little lower into grass that had never known a scythe. This, he pondered pensively, was the thing everyone was talking about, Peace—the thing distraught politicians were tearing about the world looking for. The silly fellows were looking in the wrong place. They were looking in the cities. Good. The longer they looked in the wrong place the longer would peace prevail in the few places where it was still to be found. This, undoubtedly, was one of the best of them—or so he thought.

The sun dawdled on, thrusting minutes gently into the past. He did not trouble to count them. There were more to come. It was a pity, he soliloquised, that his old comrades, "Copper" Colson and "Trapper" Troublay, were not there to enjoy it with him. They should have been, but Trapper had gone home to Canada to see his folks, and while Copper was expected to arrive at any moment he had been delayed on account of his mother, who at the moment of their departure had fallen sick. Thus, the little shooting and fishing party which their old C.O., Captain "Gimlet" King, had

arranged for them at Strathcarglas, his Highland sporting lodge, had come unstuck. At Gimlet's suggestion, when he had got in touch with him on the telephone to tell him what had happened, he had come on alone to await the arrival of Copper, and possibly Gimlet himself. And this he had done, only to find on arrival at the lodge that the caretaker and his wife, apparently through some misunderstanding, had gone on their annual visit to Edinburgh. This information he had gathered at the local post office. Even then the chapter of accidents was not finished. The local tavern, the Strathcarglas Arms, which had figured so dramatically in his first visit to the lodge, was still shut, as no new tenant for it had yet been found.[1] As a result of these unfortunate circumstances, rather than return home Cub had gone to the nearest village, Auchrory, and there, in the Fishers Arms Hotel, installed himself pending the return of the caretaker to the lodge, or the arrival of the other members of the party. He had been there for the best part of a week, most of which time he had spent in the vain pursuit of a salmon, using rods and tackle lent to him by Macnaughton, the hotel proprietor. The weather, so he had been informed, was against him, and this had proved to be only too true in spite of the fact that the river at this point was both deeper and wider than it was higher up, where it ran close to Gimlet's lodge. It was the same river. Still, the lack of co-operation on the part of the fish didn't really worry him; he was content merely to be in such restful surroundings.

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[1] See *Gimlet Comes Home*

He was dozing when the crack of a twig lifted his eyes from the river to the far bank a little way down stream, the direction from which the sound had come. Behind the rocks that held the river in its bed the bank was closely fringed with weeping birches, their leaves forming a pale green curtain between the water and a stand of conifers that occupied with stiff precision the lower part of the hill beyond. His interest was perfunctory, even slightly resentful. He thought, and hoped, that the intruder would reveal itself to be a roe deer, and his interest quickened when he saw that it was a man—not so much on that account as because the invader was dressed in a style unusual for the Highlands, where tweeds are the more general rule. The dark lounge suit he wore looked as out of place as would flannels at a funeral. Nor was the manner of his approach in accord with the scene. He came running, running hard, dodging through the trees; and as he ran he looked about him wildly, snatching frequent glances over his shoulder, at no

small risk of collision with one of the many obstructions that beset his path. And this undignified haste was all the more remarkable because the man was well advanced in years, as a grey, close-trimmed beard attested.

With a deepening frown of wonderment Cub watched the runner swerve towards an ancient birch which, standing within the spate area, had fallen aslant under its load of lichen. The man's hand went hurriedly to his pocket and came out holding an object too small for Cub to identify. This he thrust into what was apparently a fork, or hole, in the tree, although Cub could not see it. This done, he crouched for a moment, breathing heavily, staring back along his track, so that for the first time his face was clearly revealed, chalk white against a background of sombre shadow. The attitude lasted only for a moment, but it was long enough for the expression of stark, unbridled fear, to be photographed indelibly on Cub's brain. Then, still following the river, he ran on, and was quickly lost to sight in the dappled shadows. The noise of his hasty passage died away and the brae resumed its former serenity.

Cub stirred slightly, wondering what this strange behaviour signified. The man he had seen was not entirely a stranger; he had seen him once before, for he was lodging in the hotel; but as to who he was and what his name and business might be, he knew nothing. He only knew that he was not a fisherman and that he had a son, a quiet, reserved sort of lad of about fifteen. There his interest, such as it was, ended.

It did not occur to Cub that the singular scene he had just witnessed was only half played out; and he was about to get up when the sounds that had at first disturbed him were repeated in greater volume. There was a crashing in the undergrowth and two men of middle age, complete strangers this time, burst into view, following the course taken by the forerunner. Like him they were inappropriately dressed for the time and place. Both wore lounge suits of dark material, one navy blue and the other brown. The man in the blue suit wore—of all the unseasonable head-dresses he could have chosen for a Highland glen—a bowler hat. Moreover, he appeared to be a coloured man of some sort.

The two men did not stop, or even pause, but panting heavily, as if unused to vigorous exercise, looking about them they ran on, jumping over the smaller rocks and ducking under branches that impeded their progress.

In half a minute they were out of sight.

Again Cub sank back, staring, now, in thoughtful deliberation, for the drama he had witnessed had passed the stage of being merely odd. It seemed to justify serious contemplation, a form of mental exercise he knew how to employ. The outstanding factors were evident. The old man had been

running away from the two who followed in hot pursuit, presumably to obtain possession of the object which the fugitive in his extremity had hidden in the tree. It was still there. Presently, if he succeeded in giving his pursuers the slip, he would no doubt return and recover it. Cub waited.

He waited until the sun dipped behind the trees so that the far side of the pool was cast prematurely to the shadows. This was the moment to which he had been looking forward, for now a fish might "take"; but his natural curiosity had been aroused, so making his way to the shallow tail of the pool he waded over and walked along to the leaning tree. As he expected, there was a hole in it, a cavity about six inches in diameter level with his shoulder. He inserted a hand, but the hollow within was deep and he could not reach the bottom. He smiled faintly as, perceiving that the withdrawal of the object was likely to be less simple than its insertion, he visualised the old man's dilemma when he returned.

Still pondering the incident he returned to his gear, shouldered bag, gaff and rod, and walked slowly back to the hotel for supper.

He looked into the lounge in passing, ostensibly to exchange notes with any other fisherman already home, but really to see if the bearded man had returned. He was not there. But his son was. The boy was seated in a chair that commanded a view of the road up which anyone returning from the river must come. Two strangers had arrived. He recognised them at once. They were the two men he had seen by the river. They were sitting together at the far end of the room, whisky on a small table between them. Their eyes, however, were on the boy.

Cub went out. In the hall he encountered Ina, the waitress. "Oh, Ina, what's the name of the old boy with the grey beard who came a few days ago?" he inquired casually.

"You must mean Doctor Lander."

"And the young chap with him?"

"That's his son."

"Ah, that's what I thought. How long are they staying?"

"I don't know. I don't think they booked for any particular time."

"I see—thanks, Ina." Cub passed on. He had his bath but did not change, for he had a notion to go out again.

When he came down the lounge was full and the talk was all of fishing —or rather, the futility of it in such conditions. In this debate three people took no part. One was the boy, who still sat as before, staring down the road. His eyes, Cub noted, were now clouded with anxiety. The others were the two men he had seen on the river bank. They sat alone in a corner.

Occasionally one spoke in a tone too low to be overheard. Covertly they watched the boy, who gave no sign that he was aware of it. Cub watched the road, the boy, and the men, until the gong went for supper. There was a general stir, but the boy did not move.

Cub hesitated, uncertain how to act. The boy's worried expression made him feel uncomfortable. He wanted to tell him that he had seen his father by the river, and warn him that the men were watching him—as he was sure they were; but a natural reluctance to intrude into what, after all, was not his affair, restrained him. The boy's manner, too, he felt, did not encourage friendly overtures. So when presently the two strangers walked through to the dining-room he followed them in.

As Ina served his soup he asked her quietly if the newcomers had booked rooms. She told him that they had, but she did not know for how long. They were not fishers. Their names were Mr. Smith and Mr. Gray, both from the South. Mr. Gray was the one in the brown suit. Yes, they had arrived by road, in their own car.

Cub went through the meal with his attention divided between the door and the strangers, at the same time calling himself a fool for wasting time in speculation over a matter that did not concern him. The boy did not come in. He was, Cub supposed, still waiting for his father. Remembering the white, frightened face, an uneasy feeling grew on him that the old man would not come—unless he was engaged in the recovery of the object he had deposited in the tree, which would certainly be a lengthy operation.

Cub continued to speculate. It was the fact that Smith and Gray had left the river that he did not like. It suggested that they had achieved their purpose, whatever it might be. Nor did he like the look of them, although that, as he realised, might be a consequence of their suspicious behaviour.

Smith was the older. He was a man of between forty-five and fifty, robustly built, going bald in front, with a bland, self-confident manner; but his lips were thick, and his expression hard, and for all his benign indifference to his surroundings, his eyes, very dark and set wide apart, were never still. His nose was flat, as if it had been broken at some time and had had the bone taken out of it. There was a curious scar on his right cheekbone, the shape of a dog's hind leg. But it was the colour of his skin that puzzled Cub most. It was a sort of dirty greyish green, as if the man had a tincture of negro blood in his veins. Gray was an altogether different type. He was a smallish man of perhaps thirty, black-haired, sleek, and immaculate. A stiff white collar and a diamond ring on the third finger of his right hand were conspicuous, as was the corner of a crimson silk handkerchief that had been arranged to show in the outside breast pocket of

a tight-fitting jacket. It was evident at once that he was not a European. His skin was the sallow, olive brown of the Eurasian, while prominent cheek bones and flattish features suggested Mongolian ancestry. Like his companion, he was hard to place, but somewhere, thought Cub, an ancestor had made contact with the Far East. In business he might have been anything, but it was not easy to image the sort of business that could have brought him to Glencarglas. Clearly, he had not come for sport, as did most people from the South.

Cub tried to put a prosaic complexion on the scene he had witnessed by the river, and failed. The more he thought about the incident the more evident it became that he owed it to the boy to tell him about it. He was still waiting. He was obviously worried and anxious. He would have to be told eventually, anyway, if his father did not return. Indeed, thought Cub, he might—although he jibbed at the idea—have to tell the village constable. He could not forget the old man's face. Obviously, he was—or thought he was—in danger. There was no doubt whatever about that. If his pursuers were now watching the boy it seemed more than likely that he was in for trouble, too. The more Cub thought, the closer loomed the shadow of a tragedy. He wanted no truck with tragedy. He was on holiday, and he had promised himself a couple of hours at the sea-trout, after the sun was down.

He tried to work the thing out logically. The two strangers had been chasing the old man with a definite purpose. The relentlessness of their pursuit made that abundantly clear. They wanted something. The old man knew he was being followed, and he knew what the men wanted. It was reasonable to suppose that it was the object he had hidden in the tree. Either they had caught him, or they had not. If they had not, then he would have come home for supper. If they had caught him—well, anything might have happened. The pursuers, not finding what they sought on the person of their quarry, would demand to be told what he had done with it. If he had confessed that he had hidden it in the tree they would collect the object and in all probability depart. If he had refused the information they might suppose that he had left the thing at home, in which case they would make for the hotel to search his room. The fact that they had come to the hotel, therefore, suggested that so far they had been unsuccessful in their quest. If they knew about the son they might think he had it, or know where it was. If this reasoning was correct, their next step would be to visit the old man's room—assuming they knew he would not be in it. Failing in this, they would turn their attention to the boy. The least Cub thought he could do was warn him, to put him on his guard. Should the lad resent his interference or ignore the warning—well, that was his affair. He, Cub, would have

discharged his responsibility, such as it was. He would then go after the sea-trout. It was the sort of evening that promised sport.

When coffee was brought he picked up his cup and took it through to the lounge. He had to pass close to Smith and Gray. They took no notice of him—not that there was any reason why they should if they had not seen him by the river. He found the boy in the same chair, still watching the road. There was no one else in the room.

For the first time Cub looked at him closely. The boy, he thought, apart from looking worried, seemed thin and listless, as if he might have been recovering from an illness. He looked lonely, too, sitting there with no one to speak to. These things awoke in Cub a sudden sympathy, a feeling that he ought to help him. But he also wanted to go fishing. There might, he decided, be time for both. He took the plunge. Addressing the boy he said: "Forgive me for butting in, but are you waiting for your father?"

The boy started and looked up, brows knit, eyes questioning. "Yes, I am—why?" he replied in a quick nervous voice.

"I wondered—I saw him by the river this afternoon," explained Cub awkwardly, assailed suddenly by the idea that he might be making a melodrama out of a simple domestic occurrence.

"He told me he was only going for a short walk," the boy prompted, in a voice crisp with anxiety. "He said he wouldn't be long."

"You are—sort of worried about him?"

A brief pause. "Yes."

Cub thrust his hands in his pockets to cover a queer feeling of embarrassment. "Look here," he went on, "I know it's no business of mine, but was your father in any sort of danger when he went out? I have a reason for asking. Don't answer if you don't want to."

The colour drained slowly from the boy's face. He moistened his lips. "Why do you ask that?"

"I saw something going on that struck me as a trifle odd. Was he?"

"Yes."

Cub smiled lugubriously. "I was afraid you were going to say that."

The boy's eyes darkened with apprehension. "Something has happened. What is it?"

This was going farther and faster than Cub had intended—at least at this juncture; but having started he had to go on. "I don't want to start a flap, but I think you ought to know that those two queer-looking types who arrived today are watching you."

The boy stared. “Watching *me*?”

“ ’Fraid so.”

“Never mind me, what about my father?” the boy asked sharply. “Where is he?”

“I don’t know,” returned Cub truthfully. “I saw him this afternoon by the river. He seemed to be in the dickens of a hurry, and . . .”

“Go on.”

“He was being followed.”

“By these two men?”

“Yes. They didn’t spot me under the trees on the other bank. I wouldn’t let them see that you know. In fact, perhaps we had better not talk here. They’ll be in at any moment. I’m going out for a couple of hours after sea-trout. Your father may come back in that time. If he doesn’t—well, you’ll see me come in. I’ll tell you what I saw this afternoon.”

“It must have been serious for you to mention it,” observed the boy shrewdly.

“True enough,” admitted Cub. “However—but we’d better not talk here. I’ll see you when I come home, unless, of course, your father comes back, in which case the thing won’t arise. Where shall we meet?”

“My father has a bed-sitting room here—perhaps that would do?”

“What’s the number?”

“Twenty-one. My bedroom is next to it—number twenty.”

Cub nodded. “We’ll leave it like that then.”

Smith and Gray came in as he went out.

Picking up his rod Cub walked to the bottom end of his beat, the best part of two miles, crossed the bridge that spanned the river at that point, and then made his way up to the scene of the incident that still occupied his mind. By the time he had reached the hollow tree the sun was far down behind the hills, but the afterglow persisted, varnishing the river’s unbroken surfaces with carmine, blue and gold. The rocks were still warm. The sun-soaked air had not lost its heat and midges flirted joyously with death as they waltzed above the small brown trout in the tail of the pool. The only sounds were the plaintive calls of a pair of sandpipers and the murmur of water spilling over rock and stone.

He looked up and down the river. There was no one in sight. He looked at the tree which, he had good reason to believe, held the secret of the strange events of the afternoon. Nothing had changed. Moving quickly he took a fishing lead from his pocket, pressed it over the fly at the end of his

cast, inserted it into the hole and allowed it to run to the bottom. Then, taking the gut between finger and thumb at the point where it vanished into the hole, he withdrew the lead and with his eye measured the distance between it and his hand—a simple operation that told him that the base of the hollow was nearly five feet below the level of the hole. The object that he had seen dropped in was still there, he decided, for short of cutting down or mutilating the tree it was hard to see how it could be retrieved. Even if the hole was enlarged it would still be impossible to reach the bottom. A quick glance up and down the river revealed that he was still alone, so removing the lead from the fly he made a cast upon the broad surface of the pool. But he was preoccupied, and when a fish rose he struck too soon, and missed it.

With a muttered "dash it" at his carelessness, he reeled in, stood for a moment undecided, and then walked slowly up the river bank. As he walked his eyes explored the undergrowth, furtively, as if he was afraid of what he might find. In the solemn hush of the gloaming the atmosphere of tragedy seemed more tangible than it had been in the bright light of day.

He reached the next pool with his fears unrealised. It lay in deepest shadow, black and smooth, a veritable sink of mystery where the water made uncouth sucking noises as it scoured unseen holes and cavities below the summer level. Local lore asserted that this was the resort of water kelpies. They called it, aptly, the Witches Pool.

Cub advanced a pace and stared down into the pot—the deep hole usually to be found in such pools, the result of scouring during the winter spates. He could see nothing but a vague reflection of the trees behind him. Not that he expected to see anything. The water was too deep, a full twenty feet as he knew well, for he had fished there before. On rare occasions when the water was dead low and without a ripple it was just possible to see the bottom, a chaos of great boulders flung in by centuries of high water following the melting of the winter snow. Even in such conditions it was only possible to probe the depths in early morning, when the sun was on the other side.

A salmon, travelling leisurely, came swirling into the pool. From force of habit he watched for it to show again. Ten seconds later it shot high into the air from the centre of the pot, to fall back with a splash in a shower of spray. The air seemed to turn a shade cooler as Cub realised that this was no casual jump, but the startled leap of a badly-frightened fish. There was a broad ripple as the silver streak sped on up the river. It jumped again in the neck of the pool, still travelling fast. He did not see it again.

He was still pondering the strange behaviour of the fish when a silky voice behind him inquired, "Any luck?"

At the unexpected sound Cub's nerves twitched, betraying,—although until that moment he was unaware of it—the taut condition of his nerves. He turned. It was the coffee-coloured man—Gray. With smoke curling from a cigarette held loosely in the corner of his mouth he was leaning against a tree.

Cub's first thought was, how well the voice went with the face. The language used was English, without a trace of accent, but the dulcet tone employed was as foreign to the scene as would have been a peacock on the heather. "No, I can't find a fish," he answered carelessly. "I think I'll pack up."

"Lovely evening."

"Beautiful."

"Nice spot, this."

"Delightful."

"Is it a good place for catching fish?"

"Yes, it's a good place when conditions are right," acknowledged Cub.

"Pretty deep, eh?"

"Very deep."

"How deep would you say?"

"Twenty feet or so."

"Do many people come fishing here?"

"Quite a few." Cub shouldered his rod. "Well, I'll be getting along. Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

Without a backward glance Cub walked slowly to the bridge, and on towards the hotel. What, he wondered, was Gray doing there at that hour?

He met only one person on the way home, a smallish, red-whiskered man of cheerful expression who was strolling hands in pockets towards the river. He knew him by sight and reputation, as did everyone who fished the Carglas. It was Sandy Macrae, the one man in the village who somehow could always manage to get a fish. On this occasion he carried no rod, having been warned off the water for employing methods not approved by the Fishery Board. In other words, as a poacher Sandy was renowned from Speyside to Deeside. If anyone wanted a fish he could always get one from Sandy—or Sandy, if he had not one or two at home in the bath, would soon get him one. Rumour said he kept a rod hidden on the river bank.

The poacher smiled and raised a respectful hand in greeting. "Any luck, sir?" he inquired in passing.

“Not today,” returned Cub. “I’m afraid the fish won’t take until we get a change in the weather.”

“Aye, I’d think that,” agreed Sandy carelessly, as if the question of whether or not the fish would take was a matter of minor importance—which, as far as he was concerned, it was. “There was a bonny fush in the Witches Pot th’ morning,” he volunteered.

Cub nodded. “He’s probably on his way up the river by now.”

Sandy considered the sky. “Aye. There’s rain a’coming,” he opined.

“I may find one tomorrow,” said Cub as he walked on.

As he approached the hotel he looked at his watch. It was eleven o’clock. He had been out just two hours.

CHAPTER II

EXPLANATIONS

BECAUSE the lights were on and the blinds not drawn Cub could see into the lounge as he approached the front door. None of the people in whom he was interested was there. Passing the lounge door, therefore, he went in search of Jean, the chambermaid. From her he learned that Smith's room was number fourteen, and Gray's next to it. Both were on the first floor—the same floor as the rooms occupied by himself and the Landers. Gray he had left at the river, but he spent a minute looking for Smith, because he wanted to know where he was. Not finding him in the bar he went upstairs, using the staff staircase, which reached the first floor opposite number fourteen. The door was ajar. The light was not on, but he could hear someone, presumably Smith, moving about.

Proceeding along the corridor he halted at number twenty-one and without knocking turned the handle. The door yielded to his pressure so he looked in. The room was in semi-darkness, and in the half-light he could just make out the slim figure of the boy he had come to see silhouetted against the open window. "I didn't knock because Smith's door is open; I think he's inside, and I didn't want him to hear me," he explained.

"He's still watching me," stated the boy calmly.

"That's what I thought. Has your father come back?"

"No. Did you see nothing of him at the river?"

"Not a sign, but Gray was there, near the place where I saw him this afternoon."

"Won't you sit down? You were going to tell me what happened."

Cub closed the door quietly and pulled up a chair. "By the way, my name's Peters—Nigel Peters. My friends call me Cub."

"Mine's Lander—Tony Lander."

Cub smiled. "Good. Now we're all set. You know, Tony, this is all very difficult," he went on with some reluctance. "I still feel that I'm butting in on something that doesn't really concern me . . . but I thought I'd better tell you what I know."

"It's very kind of you," Tony assured him. "I'm only glad that somebody knows something of my father's movements. You see, I'm afraid he may never come back—now." He spoke without emotion.

"Oh, it may not be as bad as that," protested Cub, somewhat startled by this frank admission.

Tony shook his head, slowly. “I’ve been expecting this for some time,” he announced wearily. “Now it’s happened. Tell me what you saw. Then you’d better go, and for your own good forget all about it. There’s no need for you to become involved.”

“Don’t worry about me,” said Cub confidently. “I can take care of myself—or I should be able to by now.”

“You may think so,” returned Tony earnestly. “But this may be something bigger and far more dangerous than you imagine. Please tell me what you saw. Speak quietly in case Smith comes along to listen outside the door.”

“All right,” agreed Cub. “It won’t take long. I was fishing the home beat this afternoon. The fish weren’t taking so I packed up and lay under a tree. About half past four your father appeared on the opposite bank. He was running, and he seemed—well, pretty badly scared. He ran on and that was the last I saw of him. A minute or two later these fellows Smith and Gray appeared. They also were running, obviously chasing your father. That’s all. They disappeared in the same direction. I didn’t see any of them again. I should have thought nothing of it if your father hadn’t looked so upset.”

“He had reason to be,” said Tony slowly. “Where exactly did this happen?”

“Just below what they call the Witches Pool.”

“Did you go back there tonight?”

“Yes.”

“And you saw nothing?”

“Nothing of interest.”

“Did you look—for my father?”

“Er—yes. ’Matter of fact, I did. I was by the pool when Gray came along.”

“What was he doing?”

“Nothing in particular as far as I could see. He came up behind me, quietly.”

“Did he say anything?”

“He spoke about fishing—asked me if fishermen often went there, and wanted to know how deep the water was.”

“You’re sure he didn’t see you this afternoon?”

“I’m pretty certain of it.”

There was a brief silence. “What I don’t understand is why these men are still hanging about,” Tony went on. “If they’ve got what they came for why haven’t they gone?”

“Perhaps they haven’t got what they came for.”

“If they overtook my father they must surely have got it. He always carried in his pocket the thing they wanted.”

“So that was what the fuss was about? They wanted something your father had, eh?”

“Yes.”

“He knew that?”

“Yes.”

“Then why on earth did he carry it about with him? Why not pop it into the bank, or somewhere equally safe?”

“I don’t know.”

“But you knew all about this?”

“Of course. We, my father and I, have lived under a shadow for some time, moving from place to place, trying to give these people the slip. But sooner or later they found us. As you see, they even found us here, within a day or two of our arrival.”

Cub considered Tony curiously. “May I ask what this thing is these men are after?”

“You may, but I can’t answer.”

“Can’t?”

“I don’t know what it is—or was.”

“*You* don’t know!” Cub’s voice rose with astonishment.

“My father never told me. I only know that although he went in fear of his life he wouldn’t part with it.”

Cub thought for a moment. “But I don’t quite understand. I thought you didn’t know these men, Smith and Gray. Now I gather they’ve been after you for some time?”

“I knew somebody was after us, but I didn’t know who. This is the first time I’ve seen these two men. My father may or may not have recognised them, but he must have realised that he was being followed. What puzzles me is why they are still here.”

“They’re here because they haven’t got what they came for,” declared Cub.

Tony’s eyebrows went up. “You speak as if you were sure of that?”

"I've reason to think it," said Cub. "You see, Tony, while your father was running I saw him stop to hide something. That could only have been the thing which, from what you tell me, these fellows were after."

"Then you know where it is?"

"I think so."

"Where is it?"

"I'd rather not tell you."

"Why?"

"Because if you don't know—well, you don't know, and neither threats nor anything else could get the information out of you. It's safer for you not to know. Nobody but you knows that I know. For the moment, at any rate, it's better that things should stay that way. Of course, if you insist. . . ."

Speaking slowly and seriously Tony broke in. "You'd better forget where the thing is, forget the whole business, or you may find yourself in the position that my father and I have suffered."

Cub smiled. "I'll think about it. Meanwhile, the pressing question is, what are you going to do about your father?"

"What *can* I do?"

Cub shrugged. "Frankly, I don't know. It's a bit early to talk about bringing in the police, although if the thing's as serious as you say you may have to go to them. But I don't think there's much point in starting a search at this time of night."

"If my father was alive he'd have returned by now," said Tony heavily.

"He may still come."

"I don't think so, now, after what you've told me. They caught him. If there's nothing more we can do we might as well go to bed. It's getting late."

The worried frown in Cub's forehead deepened. "I'm afraid you may have a spot of trouble with these fellows who call themselves Smith and Gray—which, by the way, strike me as being convenient names. We can reckon they'll still try to get what they came for. If they haven't already done so, it's a pretty safe bet that their next shot will be at this room. When that fails they'll be after you."

Tony lifted a shoulder. "What does it matter? I almost wish they could find what they want, and then perhaps they'd clear off."

Cub looked pained. "Here, I say, I wouldn't take that view. No fear! I'm all for making life difficult for the blighters."

“If they come to me asking questions I shall tell them that I know nothing.”

“They may not believe you.”

“They can please themselves about that.”

“They may search your room. There are no locks on any of the doors here—or rather, they don’t work.”

“Mine has a catch on the inside.”

“That may be all right when you’re in your room, but it’s no use when you go out.”

“They won’t find anything.”

“All right, if that’s how you feel about it. If they try any rough stuff I hope you’ll let me know?”

“Thanks. Really, I’m desperately worried, and in need of help, but I don’t see what anyone can do. If. . . .” Tony broke off as footsteps padding down the passage ended outside the door. His eyes met Cub’s, questioningly.

Cub laid a finger on his lips. Rising, he walked quickly but softly to the wardrobe and stood in the narrow cavity that occurred between one end of it and the wall. He could not see the door but he heard it open.

A voice, a man’s voice, with a husky American accent, said: “Sorry, kid. Must have made a mistake. These doors are all alike in the dark.” The door closed. Footsteps retreated.

Cub stepped out. “That, I think, was Smith.”

“Yes.”

“You see what I mean? That was no mistake. He came to have a look round. I’m afraid it’s a bad sign.”

“In what way?”

“Well—er——” Cub hesitated.

“Go on.”

“He must have known your father wasn’t here. He expected to find the room empty.”

“I’d already realised that. He seemed a bit surprised to find me here.”

“He may have assumed that you would be in your room.”

Tony stared through the open window at the forbidding silhouette of the Cromdale Hills. When he spoke again his voice was tremulous for the first time. “My father is somewhere out there,” he breathed. “It’s awful to know that, yet do nothing about it—but what can I do?”

“I’ll go and have another look round if you like.”

"It's no use—you know that; thanks all the same. We can only wait to see what happens."

There was a sudden and unusual burst of activity in the village square below. A man jumped off a bicycle allowing it to fall with a crash. He called something to someone.

Cub looked out of the window, but the light was too dim for him to see distinctly the cause of the disturbance. He observed that the usual crowd of idlers outside the post office had broken up and had strung out behind the stalwart form of Peter Ross, the local policeman, who was walking with unaccustomed briskness towards a man who came running from the direction of the river. It was Sandy Macrae, and he faltered as he ran like a man who has travelled in haste and is nearly at the end of his endurance.

Cub turned back into the room. Remembering that he had seen the poacher obviously bound for the river he had an uncomfortable suspicion of what had happened; but he did not voice it. He simply said: "I'll be moving off now. You had better go to your room. If you need me send a message—or come along to my room if you like."

"Thanks," answered Tony simply.

Cub went out and down the stairs. By the time he had reached the badly lighted hall a little group had collected just inside the front door. Macnaughton, the proprietor of the hotel, was trying to keep others out. The central figures of the group were Ross the policeman and Macrae the poacher.

"All right; don't make such an infernal noise, Macrae. I'll get my car out," said Macnaughton.

Cub joined the party. "What's the trouble?" he inquired.

Macnaughton turned a harassed face. "This is a nice business," he rapped out petulantly. "Right in the middle of the season, too. There's been an accident—one of the guests."

"Which one?"

"It sounds like Doctor Lander from the description. That rascally poacher was at his old games on my water and snatched a bigger fish than he bargained for. He dragged something to the top of the Witches Pool and saw a face staring at him."

Cub moistened his lips. "What did he do?"

Macnaughton sneered. "Dropped everything and bolted. The body is still in the river with his hooks in it. I'm going down with Ross to fetch it. Don't

tell the others. They'll have to know in the morning, but it won't sound so bad in daylight."

"If it's Lander, what about his son? He'll have to know."

"As soon as we're sure I'll send Mrs. Fraser up to tell him." Mrs. Fraser was the manageress.

"What are you going to do with the body?"

"There's a mortuary at the back of the police station."

"Would you like me to come along and give a hand?"

"Come if you like. What was the old man doing by the river—he doesn't fish?" Macnaughton strode away, muttering.

Someone had given the poacher a dram of whisky. The glass rattled against his teeth. "I was just having one cast," he spluttered. "Just one, ye ken, for a wee beastie, . . ."

Cub followed Macnaughton. He was not surprised, but this dramatic confirmation of his fears shook him. He saw again the white frightened face and the sinister pool. He saw other things too, with disconcerting clarity. An accident, Macnaughton had said, and that was what it would look like. That was what everyone would think. Only he knew the truth. There was no doubt in his mind about the body being that of Doctor Lander. In his agitation he nearly told the policeman so, nearly told him what he had seen, but checked himself in time. He might suspect, but he could prove nothing. He could not even prove that Smith and Gray had been near the river, should they deny it. He would, he decided, have to think, and think hard, before he did anything.

Ross beckoned to Sandy Macrae. "Come away," he ordered curtly. "I want you."

Cub climbed into the back of Macnaughton's car.

CHAPTER III

CUB MAKES A FRIEND

IT did not take the car long to reach the place where the road came nearest to the river, which, as it happened, was immediately above the Witches Pool. In fact, it was the steep brae at that spot that caused the river to swerve, and in doing so scour out the deep "pot." Leaving the car at the side of the road the investigators scrambled down the brae, with Macrae, who clearly had no love for the task on hand, still muttering under his breath about daft people from the South who fell in the river and spoilt the "fushin'."

If the pool had looked dark and forbidding in the light of day, in the eerie lingering dusk, with all sounds of bird life hushed, it looked positively evil; and the sullen hiss and gurgle of the water did nothing to brighten the picture. No wonder, thought Cub, the local people had given the place a sinister reputation. If there were such things as water kelpies this would surely be their headquarters.

However, he had little time to dwell on such disturbing fancies, for the policeman, as if as anxious as Macrae to be gone, was already busy on the gruesome duty that had brought him out. He went to Macrae's rod, still lying where it had been dropped in the poacher's panic flight, and picking it up, wound in the line until it was taut. When this had been done it could be seen that the line entered the water close under the bank at the edge of the pot. The constable raised the point of the rod and put some strain on it. The rod bent, but as the line remained fast he put it down and took the line in his hands. Advancing to the edge of the water he began to pull, and then, slowly, the line began to come towards him. Hand over hand he drew it in. "There's something on, and it's no' a fush," he said in a curious voice. "Stand by to grab it when it shows. If the hooks come away we'll be here all night."

(See p. 36.)

"*There's something on, and it's no' a fush.*"

Cub stepped forward. During the war he had looked on death too often to be afraid of it. He knew that now, as then, it was from the living that he had most to fear. Macnaughton joined him, but the poacher backed away, making noises in his throat.

At last a dark heavy object broke the inky surface of the stream. Both Cub and Macnaughton dropped on their knees and reached out. Cub's fingers sank into the soft material of the garment.

"Up with him," grunted Macnaughton.

Cub heaved, and a moment later a human body, the body of a man, lay on the bank, with water trickling from drenched clothes back into the river.

Macnaughton turned the body over. "Aye, it's Lander," he said in a hushed voice as he straightened himself.

Cub drew a deep breath as his worst fears were realised. Tony would never see his father again.

The policeman examined the body as far as this was possible in the light of his torch. "He had a nasty crack on the forehead," said he. "Struck his head on a rock when he fell, na'doot. Knocked himself oot. That's why he went to the bottom, I'm thinkin'. Young Mackenzie from yon farm did the same thing two years back, ye ken, Mac? Puir mon. Ach, well; let's get him up the brae to the car."

From these remarks it was evident to Cub that no thought of foul play had entered the head of anyone but himself. After all, he mused, why should it? The tragedy had all the appearances of an accident, one of those simple accidents which are by no means uncommon in the wilder districts of the Highlands. Had he not been a witness of the suspicious events on the river bank during the afternoon, he, too, would have assumed that the man had died as the result of an accident. He said nothing, deciding quickly that this was neither the time nor place to disillusion the other members of the party. One word in front of the poacher and the whole village would be talking of murder before the night was out.

Not without difficulty the limp body was carried up the brae to the car. Nothing more was said. Macnaughton drove the car back to the village. He stopped outside Macrae's cottage to let him get off.

"I'll be seein' ye in the mornin'," the policeman told him curtly.

Macnaughton drove on and stopped again outside the hotel to let Cub dismount. There was nothing more he could do. The car went on to the police station with its grim burden.

When Cub went into the hotel he found that most of the guests had retired for the night. Smith and Gray were still in the lounge, with whisky on one of the small tables between them. Cub did not speak. He went on up the stairs and knocked gently on the door of room twenty. A voice, Tony's voice, called to him to enter. He went in and closed the door behind him. The light was off, so he switched it on, and found Tony, still fully dressed,

sitting on his bed. He drew a deep breath, not relishing the task which he had taken upon himself. But the boy would have to be told the truth sometime, and in the circumstances, in view of what he knew, he decided that he was probably the best person to break the evil tidings.

Tony's eyes were on his face, open wide, asking a question. "Well?" he whispered.

Cub squared himself. "I'm sorry, Tony, but I shall have to ask you to brace yourself for bad news," he said quietly.

"They've found my father?"

"Yes."

"He is—dead?"

A brief pause. "Yes."

Tony held himself well in hand. Only his head seemed to drop a little. "I knew it," he said in a quite steady voice. "Don't ask me how I knew, but I knew. Perhaps it was because I've been expecting this, dreading it, for months; so it isn't such a shock as you may think. Oh, why did my father have to behave as he did—why—why—why?" The boy rolled over and buried his face in the pillow.

"That's something we may never know," answered Cub gently, sitting on the bed and putting a hand on the boy's shoulder. "But it's happened, and it will have to be faced."

"Where did they find him?" came in a muffled voice.

"In the river."

"They'll think it was an accident, of course?"

"Of course. There's no reason why they should think anything else. No doubt it was made to look like an accident. Only we know—it wasn't."

Tony sat up abruptly. "My father was murdered!" He forced the words out through his teeth.

"Yes, I think he was," agreed Cub frankly. "If he wasn't actually killed by those two men then his death was certainly brought about by his efforts to escape from them. Tell me: did your father carry a weapon of any sort?"

"I don't think so. He wasn't that sort of man. Don't misunderstand me, though. He wasn't a coward. He simply tried to keep clear of trouble. That's why we were always on the move."

"Have you seen anything of Smith or Gray since I left you?"

"No. I haven't been downstairs. Are they still in the hotel?"

"Yes. They're in the lounge, drinking."

"Then I'll——" Tony sprang up.

Cub put out a restraining hand. "Take it easy, laddie," he said softly. "I know how you feel, but you won't do any good at this moment by blurting out what you know. We've nothing against these men; nothing, that is, which in court——"

"But you saw them——"

"What I saw amounted to very little," asserted Cub. "What did I see? I saw Smith and Gray on the river bank. That could easily be explained. After all, everyone here goes to the river. And they weren't even at the place where your father's body was found. I was down at the river myself, if it comes to that. No. The best thing for the time being is to let everyone think it was an accident. Pretend to believe that yourself, as I shall."

"And let these murderers escape?"

"I didn't say that. What I said was, let us lead them to think that we accept the accident theory. That may put them off their guard. It won't be easy for you, I know, but you must try. Once they have an inkling that you suspect the truth, either they'll disappear, in which case we might never find them again, or they'll kill you, too. We'll bring them to the gallows all in good time, never fear. You can't commit murder and get away with it."

"But how will we ever prove anything if we don't speak up now?"

Cub shook his head. "I don't know. All I know is, our best chance is to keep our mouths shut. Don't worry. I'll help you—and I have some useful friends who will help us both."

"But what can you do?" went on Tony wearily. "You haven't a clue, and I can't see how you'll ever get one now."

"I'm not so sure about that," returned Cub. "What about this object your father hid? That may tell us something to put us on the right track. Only I know where it is. Smith and Gray want it. That's why they came here in the first place and that's why they're still here. They expected to find it on your father, that's pretty certain, otherwise there would have been no point in killing him. But he had got rid of it, so the murderers committed their crime for nothing, which must have made them pretty sick. All the same, they must know it isn't far away, so the chances are they'll stay here until they do find it. They'll stay in this hotel because there's nowhere else for them to go. There is this about it: if these scoundrels were prepared to commit murder to get the thing then it must be either very valuable or important."

Tony nodded. "I shall have to stay here myself if it comes to that."

"I'm not so sure," returned Cub. "I have a friend who has a house not far away, and if it suited us we could go there. We might go, anyway. We'll see.

For the present it suits me to be here, so that I can keep an eye on Smith and Gray. Tomorrow I shall recover the thing your father hid in the tree. Surely that will tell us something. You say you've no idea at all what it could be?"

"No, but I fancy it must be something to do with Siam. My father's manner seemed to change from the time we left there."

Cub stared. "From *where*?"

"Siam. It was called Thailand at one time. I was born there. Perhaps that's why I'm such a feeble-looking specimen. I had fever pretty badly. My mother died of it. She's buried in the jungle near our bungalow."

"What was your father doing in Siam?" asked Cub curiously.

"He was in practice as a doctor. I don't know how he came to go there in the first place, but he built up a very good practice, with people of the country, some of whom are very rich, as well as Europeans. When the Jap invasion came we had to bolt, of course. My father said we would make for Singapore, but we left it too late. Everything was in hopeless confusion. We ran out of petrol, and I don't know what would have happened if we hadn't got a lift on a lorry. We had a pretty awful time, and lost everything, of course, as did most people. I suppose we were lucky to get away at all, but we managed to get on a ship which took us to Australia. It's all a bit vague to me now. After all, I was only a kid then."

Cub smiled, wondering what Tony thought he was now.

"Eventually we got back to England, and we seem to have been drifting about ever since," concluded Tony.

"Why didn't your father settle down somewhere?"

"He didn't talk much, but I think he always hoped to get back to Siam, where we were known. After all, my mother is buried there. My father was never the same after she died."

"Why didn't he go straight back after the war was over?"

"I don't know. He seemed strange, as if he was afraid of something. Twice he booked our passages, once by air and once by sea, and cancelled them at the last moment."

"Hm." Cub pondered Tony's words. "That doesn't throw much light on the mystery, except. . . ." He looked up. "Come to think of it, one of these men, Gray, looks as if he might have Siamese blood in him. He's got a good dose of the Orient in him, anyway."

Tony nodded. "I noticed that."

"He could be a Siamese—of sorts."

“Easily. He’s probably a half-breed—there are thousands of them, all sorts of mixtures.”

“You’ve never seen him before?”

“No. What I’m wondering is, what he’ll do next.”

“I think I can tell you what the pair of them will do,” returned Cub slowly. “First, they’ll search your father’s room. That won’t do any harm because I’m pretty sure the thing they’re looking for isn’t there. Next, they’ll try your room. If that fails, as it will, they’ll start asking you questions, thinking you might have been in your father’s confidence. If they do try that tell them nothing—not a word. If they start threatening you—well, I shan’t be far away. It might be as well if they didn’t see us too much together. They’ll think you’re alone in the world now, and that’s where they’ll be wrong. But I’m afraid we shall have to be practical. How are you off for money?”

“I haven’t any.”

“None?”

“None at all. I don’t think my father was very well off, but he gave me any money I needed—not that I wanted much. He paid all the bills.”

Cub smiled. “Well, we needn’t worry about that. I’ve got a bit. You just carry on. I’ll speak to Macnaughton and make things right with him until your father’s will is proved—if he made one. Do you know if your father had a lawyer in this country? If he had, you’d better get in touch with him.”

“Yes. He went to see him once. I went with him. I don’t know what it was about because I was left in the waiting room.”

“Where was this?”

“In London. The name of the firm, I remember, was Hawkins & Co., in Staple Court.”

Cub nodded. “You must send them a wire in the morning. If it’s any sort of a firm at all they’ll provide you with money until your father’s estate is settled. Your father must have had some money, in which case the lawyers will know about it. They’ll get in touch with his bank, and so on. You can leave that to them.”

“All right.”

“No doubt the police will hand over to you any money or valuables your father happened to have on him. You’ll have to answer any questions they ask you, of course, but that will be mostly concerned with identity, I imagine. Say nothing about what I’ve told you.”

Tony looked at Cub with tears in his eyes for the first time. “I don’t see why you should do all this for me. It will spoil your holiday. You didn’t even know my father.”

Cub forced a smile. “That has nothing to do with it. I don’t like murder any more than you do, and anyway, it must have been the hand of Fate that brought me into the affair. You can’t dodge Fate. Strictly speaking I should tell the police what I know, and so I would were I not convinced that it would do more harm than good. In fact, I’m afraid, with all due respect to the police, it would wreck any chance we have of bringing the murderers to book. The police have fixed procedure and they can’t get away from it. The first thing they’d do would be to question Smith and Gray about what they were doing by the river. They’d ask them if they saw your father. The answer to that question would be no. Smith and Gray would simply say they were out for a walk, which would sound reasonable enough. All I could say was, I saw the two men by the river. The result would be, Smith and Gray would vanish, and your life would be in greater danger than ever—to say nothing of mine.”

“You think I am in danger?”

“Yes, I do,” replied Cub seriously. “These men have made it clear that they will stop at nothing to get what they came for. Your real danger will come after they’ve searched these rooms and found nothing. No doubt they’ll search along the river bank, too, to see if your father threw away the thing when they were pursuing him.” Cub got up. “Well, there’s nothing more we can do tonight. You try to get some sleep. I’ll make a plan for tomorrow, I shall probably pretend to be going fishing, and if there’s no one about I’ll have another look at that tree. To get at what is in it will mean sawing the tree down, I’m afraid. However, that shouldn’t be difficult.”

“Can I come with you when you go?”

Cub hesitated. “I don’t see why not,” he decided. “It would be natural, in view of the tragedy, for someone to take an interest in you, and it might as well be me. I’m not much older than you are. If anyone asks about you I shall say I’m taking you out with me, fishing, rather than leave you at the hotel by yourself.”

“What will happen—to my father?”

This was another awkward question for Cub. “He’ll be buried here I suppose, unless you have any special wish in the matter?”

Tony shook his head. “No. What does it matter, now? I shall go to the funeral, of course.”

“I’ll come with you,” promised Cub. “I’ll have a word with the police about it. That’s enough for now. I’ll get along to my room. Come to me there if there’s any trouble.”

“All right. Good night, and thanks again.”

Cub waved and went out. There was no one in the corridor. As he walked along to his room he could hear rain beating on the windows. This was the break in the weather for which he had been hoping, was the thought that passed through his mind; but the fishing would have to wait, he decided. He had something more important to do. That the rain was going to upset his plan was something that did not occur to him.

Deep in thought he undressed and went to bed.

CHAPTER IV

THE RIVER TAKES A HAND

THE following morning Cub was up and about before the breakfast gong had sounded. The weather, he was pleased to note, had cleared somewhat; at any rate, it was no longer raining, although low clouds drifting sluggishly among the high hills gave promise of more to come.

His first visit was to the office of the manageress. He told her that Tony was staying on for a bit, and that he would make himself responsible until the boy knew what he was going to do. He then went to the post office and sent telegrams to Gimlet and Copper, wording them in such a way that their real significance would be realised only by the recipients. His next visit was to the police station. No further news was forthcoming except that the Chief Constable was expected. The local doctor had examined Doctor Lander and furnished the death certificate. It was clear from the policeman's manner that he took it for granted that Doctor Lander had died as the result of an accident, so the rest of the proceedings were merely a matter of form. The few things found in the dead man's pockets—a few pounds in notes, some small silver, a gold watch and fountain pen—would be handed over to his son in due course.

Preparations would be made for the funeral there, if that was the boy's wish. Macnaughton had provided evidence of identification. There was nothing for Tony to do. He could see his father if he wished. Cub said he thought he had better not.

By this time the village shop had opened and Cub went in to make two purchases. One was a chopper and the other a hand saw. While he was waiting for change from the note he had tendered Smith came in to buy some cigarettes. He saw the tools at once, as he was bound to, and little guessing the purpose for which they were required, made a silly joking remark about them and their connection with fishing. At the moment Cub was annoyed about this. The last people he wanted to see the tools were Smith and Gray, and it had been his intention to hide them beside the road and pick them up on his way to the river. Thinking fast he turned the occasion to advantage by saying, casually, that the implements were, in a way, connected with his fishing. He had lost some hooks on an overhanging branch, which, to facilitate casting, should have been cut off long ago. As this had not been done he had decided to do it himself. This, he thought, as he left the shop, was reasonable enough. Now, if either of the men saw him

on the river bank with the tools, they would know, or think they knew, what he was doing. Otherwise they might have wondered.

On his way back to the hotel he encountered the water bailiff. He had already a slight acquaintance with the man and greeted him with a cheerful good morning.

"Ye'll no do much good th' day at the fishing, I'm thinkin'," said the river guardian in passing.

"Why not?" asked Cub, a trifle surprised.

"She's a big river," was the reply. "She fairly comin' doon after last night's rain."

Cub smiled, paying little attention to the remark. That it might affect his programme did not occur to him, although it should have done, as he was to realise later.

Passing on to the hotel he put his purchases in his fishing bag, which hung in the hall, and went in to breakfast. Most of the guests were down by this time. Smith and Gray were there, but Tony had not yet put in an appearance. Everything was the same as usual, except that the customary buzz of cheerful conversation was absent, the natural result of the tragedy of which everyone was now aware. Assailed by a sudden uneasiness Cub was about to go up to Tony's room in search of him when the boy, looking pale and hollow-eyed, walked in. A rather embarrassing hush fell, out of respect for the bereaved fellow guest.

Cub, looking at the table which Tony had until then shared with his father, saw that only one place had been laid. It was the same at his own table, a table for two, where he sat alone. An idea struck him. Speaking in a normal voice, which in the circumstances was loud enough for the whole room to hear, he said to Tony: "I wonder if you'd care to share my table with me? There's plenty of room."

Tony answered: "Thank you. Yes, I'd like to."

Cub beckoned to the waitress and told her to move Tony's things to his table, which was soon done.

Again Cub thought he had done a useful piece of work, in that the move had brought them together in such a manner that no one, not even Smith or Gray, could see anything peculiar or significant in it. After that it would not be thought odd if they spent the day together.

Conversation in the room was resumed, but until Smith and Gray went out, as they soon did, Cub said nothing to Tony of the subject that was uppermost in their minds; but as soon as the door had closed behind the two

suspected men Cub looked at Tony meaningly and said, in a low voice: “Did you sleep all right—no disturbance, or anything like that?”

“Nothing to speak of,” answered Tony, softly. “I think they searched my father’s room. I could hear them in there, through the wall. It’s very thin. At least, someone was in there and I can’t think who it else could be. I’ve been in, but nothing seems to have been touched.”

“They didn’t try *your* room?”

“No.”

“They’ll probably do that today, if you go out,” opined Cub.

“Have you any fresh news?” asked Tony.

“No. I’ve spoken to the hotel management, and the police, about you. I’ve told them you’re staying on until your father’s affairs are settled. I don’t think there’s anything for you to do at the moment other than send a wire to your father’s lawyers, as we arranged. Do that as soon as you’ve finished breakfast. Then we’ll go fishing. By the way, I’ve sent wires to my friends in case we should need help.”

“What did you say?”

Cub smiled faintly. “I merely said there were some exceptional fish to be caught. I might not be able to manage alone.”

“Will they understand that?”

“You bet they will.”

Nothing more was said until they went through into the hall. Smith and Gray were there, apparently doing nothing in particular, unless, as Cub suspected, they were watching Tony to see where he went. If they were going to watch him all day, he thought, it was going to be awkward. So he said to Tony, in a voice loud enough to be overheard: “What are you going to do with yourself all day? It won’t do you any good to hang about the hotel. I’m going down to the river. Would you care to come with me?”

Tony looked surprised for a moment. Then, understanding, he answered: “Thanks. But are you sure I won’t be in the way?”

“Not in the least.”

“Then I’ll come.”

“Good enough,” agreed Cub. “I’ll go to the kitchen and get them to put up sandwiches for two. I’ve got a spare flask for tea. You’d better bring a mackintosh. I’ll meet you here in ten minutes.”

“All right. I’m only going to slip over to the post office,” answered Tony.

Smith and Gray went into the lounge, so Cub went off to make arrangements for the picnic lunch.

In ten minutes they met again in the hall. Tony said he was ready.

"Okay, then let's get off."

"How far is this place?" asked Tony as they set off down the road.

"About a couple of miles."

"Where did Smith and Gray go?"

"The last I saw of them they were going into the lounge," replied Cub. "I don't think they'll worry us at the moment, although we'd better keep an eye open in case they come to the river. It wouldn't surprise me if they did. If they do, and happen to speak to us, be careful what you say. Leave the talking to me. On no account must they think we're looking for the same thing as they are. Our game is to act as if we knew nothing about it. There is this; while it remains where it is they haven't a hope of finding it."

"What's going to happen when they realise that they've had their trouble for nothing; when they have to admit to themselves that the thing can't be found?"

"I don't know," answered Cub thoughtfully. "From what you've told me about your father being followed there may be someone else in this affair. I mean, Smith and Gray may be acting for somebody. If so, I imagine they'll get in touch with him and tell him what has happened. Of one thing you may be sure. When all else fails these stiffs will corner you and ask questions. You'll be their last hope, so don't go wandering off alone or you may find yourself in serious trouble."

While this conversation had been taking place they had arrived within sight of the river, although it was still some distance away, and below them, at the bottom of the glen. The sight of it brought a frown to Cub's forehead, for he realised now what the water bailiff had meant when he spoke of a big river. The river was, in fact in roaring spate, a surging, peat-coloured flood that was carrying all before it. It was far above the level of the previous day, but how much it had actually risen Cub could not yet tell. As a result of the rise the river had of course become much wider.

Tony looked at Cub's face. "What's the matter?" he asked, perceiving that something was wrong.

"I'm looking at the river," answered Cub, in a worried voice. "She's in a nasty mood. I'm beginning to wonder if we shall get to the tree." Another thought that passed through his mind was this: If the body of Tony's father had not by the merest chance been found overnight, it would never have been found. It would have been carried by the flood to the sea, and long before it got there it would have been battered by rocks out of all recognition. He strode on, and did not speak again until they came to the top

of the brae above the Witches Pool. There, with mounting dismay, he saw that the high water had so changed the pool that he hardly recognised the place. This was not particularly important because the tree that was his objective was some distance below the pool; but he was afraid that he might find things as bad there. In any case, there could now be no question of wading the river as he had done the previous day, to reach the tree, which was on the opposite bank. Nothing could live a moment in such a raging torrent. They would have to go round by the old stone bridge, more than a mile further on.

As a result of this they were much later arriving at the objective than Cub had estimated—not that it really mattered for they had the whole day before them. By this time it was obvious that he had set himself a difficult task. Not until he actually stood beside the water did he realise the terrible force of the river as it thundered over its bed.

One glance at the tree, when he came within sight of it, and his worst fears were realised. A good three feet of the trunk was under water. What could be seen of the tree rose stiffly from the flood several paces from dry ground, and it was not smooth water, either. It was being flung into leaping turbulence by submerged rocks. There could be no question of wading. And then Cub noticed something else. The tree was now at a considerable angle, leaning under the weight of water. It was clear that any moment might see it wrenched from the bank and carried away.

Cub pointed. “There’s our tree,” he said bitterly. “We can’t get to it. I might as well tell you now. You see that hole, just below the first branch? It was in there that your father put something when he was running along this bank yesterday.” He was too concerned with his predicament to go into further details. “If that water rises another inch the tree will fall and that will be the end of it,” he said grimly. “Believe it or not, yesterday that tree was clear of the water.”

“The water may start to fall now that the rain has stopped,” suggested Tony helpfully.

“The rain may not have stopped on the high ground—that’s where all this water is coming from,” answered Cub. “Anyway, if it rains again we’ve had it. What rotten luck.”

“We’re in no hurry. Let’s wait,” offered Tony.

“That’s all we can do,” returned Cub. “I’ll put my rod together for the look of the thing in case anyone comes along, but they’ll think I’m out of my mind trying to catch a fish with the water in this state. Find a piece of

stick and push it into the bank level with the water; that should soon tell us whether it's rising or falling."

Tony obeyed while Cub put up his rod. Then it began to rain, not heavily, but the fine drizzle which is generally known as a Scotch mist.

"Well, that's that," muttered Cub in a tone of finality, as he put on his mackintosh. "We can't do anything, so there's no point in standing here. Let's get back under the pines; they'll give us some shelter. We may be here for some time."

Tony agreed, and they moved back under the thicker trees. Finding a fallen one they sat on it, with nothing better to do than watch the depressing spectacle in front of them. The noise of the rushing waters drowned all other sounds. After a while Cub unstrapped his fishing bag and produced the lunch sandwiches and vacuum flask. "We might as well eat," he suggested without enthusiasm.

For some minutes they sat under the dripping trees munching their sandwiches without speaking. Then Tony said: "So it was along here that my father came yesterday?"

Cub nodded. "Yes, but it was a different world then. It was too hot to fish and the water was dead low." He pointed to the far bank. "I was lying over there in the grass when your father appeared, running, a bit lower down. He had no sooner gone than Smith and Gray appeared. They were running, too. That was what made me sit up and take notice. They must have overtaken your father at the Witches Pool—or maybe, having got rid of the thing they were after, he just sat down and waited for them."

Curiously enough, in his disappointment at not being able to reach the tree Cub had quite forgotten the likelihood of the men, who were the cause of the tragedy, coming that way. He stiffened with surprise, therefore when, a movement catching his eye, he looked up to see them coming along the bank, on the same side as themselves. They were walking slowly, looking at the ground as they came. He laid a hand on Tony's arm. "S—sh," he breathed. "Look who's coming. They're going over the ground again. Keep quite still. I don't think they'll see us—not that it matters much if they do."

The two men continued to advance, searching the ground thoroughly as they came. From time to time they exchanged remarks, almost shouting above the noise of the water in order to be heard.

Said Gray: "This is a mugs' game, I tell you."

"We've got to look somewhere, haven't we?" retorted Smith. "He threw it away, knowing we were after him."

"I still reckon the boy might have got it."

“We’ll leave the boss to settle that. He was pretty savage this morning when I told him what had happened.”

Cub glanced at Tony and raised his eyebrows at this piece of information.

The men were by now level with the tree that held the secret for which they sought with such diligence; and, by a curious chance, it chose that very moment to fall. Tony, with a gasp of dismay—drowned fortunately by the noise of the torrent—started up; but Cub dragged him down. “Still!” he hissed. And then, as if to add insult to injury, the tree held apparently by a single root, swung round with the current until it lay flush with the bank—a position which would have suited Cub admirably had the men not been there. As it was, had Gray but known it, he was within a yard of the thing he was at such pains to find.

The men walked on, at a speed which, to Cub, seemed even slower than the pace of the proverbial snail. Their eyes never left the ground, otherwise, had they looked round, they must have seen Cub and Tony sitting there.

With what impatience Cub watched them go can be better imagined than described. No sooner were they swallowed up in the misty rain than he grabbed his bag and made a dash for the tree. He reached it just two seconds too late. The last root snapped, or was torn out of the bank. The tree began to move. Cub made a grab at a branch and was nearly dragged into the water. He had to let go to save himself. In a moment the tree was going down the river, slowly turning over and over as the branches bumped on the river’s rocky bed.

In his anguish Tony groaned.

Said Cub, with a confidence that he certainly did not feel: “No matter; we’ve still got a chance. It won’t go far. It will either get caught up on a rock or in the branches of a low-hanging tree. Let’s follow it.”

(See p. 56.)

In a moment the tree was going down the river.

Stumbling over slimy boulders, staggering knee deep in boggy sphagnum moss, crashing through fallen trees, Cub forced a way along a bank as wild as only that of a Highland river can be. To make matters worse, the ground was new to him, for he had never fished that particular stretch. For two hundred yards or so he continued the chase, with Tony at his heels,

at no small risk of broken bones, if nothing worse. Then the river made a sharp turn and he pulled up with a gesture of impotence. The bank rose sharply in a sheer face of rock against which the water hurled itself with terrifying force, making further progress out of the question.

Borne with other debris on the flood the tree went on, its branches, already mutilated to jagged stumps, rising and falling like arms waving a mocking farewell.

CHAPTER V

WATERY WORK

FOR perhaps a minute Cub stood watching the receding tree, tense with a feeling of frustration. "It's almost as though the devil himself has a hand in this," he muttered savagely. "No," he went on quickly. "I can't believe after what has happened that the thing was doomed to end this way. It doesn't make sense. I'm not going to give up now. Our one and only hope of solving this mystery is floating down the river. If we can't get round that face of rock we shall have to climb it and go down the other side."

"Anything in that tree must be pretty wet by now," observed Tony miserably.

"Never mind that. Come on! Up the brae!" Cub's voice had a clarion note in it.

To climb the brae was easier said than done, for at this point it was a steeply sloping, birch-clad bank, more than a hundred feet high, the surface littered with rocks, fallen trees, and a general accumulation of ages. What lay at the top could not be seen, but Cub imagined—correctly as it turned out—that it would be flat open ground of some sort. Using hands and feet he began to climb. "Look out! Keep clear of me!" he shouted, as a great boulder came away in his hands and went crashing down into the river. Hand over hand, slipping and sliding, puffing and blowing, perspiring freely, sometimes knee deep in bog and sometimes slithering on slanting, moss-covered rock, he went on. Nor did he stop until he had reached the top, where he flung himself down in a field of rough grass, gasping for breath and with his heart nearly thumping out of his chest from his violent exertions. Looking below he was surprised to find that Tony was not far behind. Running along he put out a hand and hauled him over the brink. "We must keep going," he panted. Really, he did not think they had the slightest chance of overtaking the tree; in fact he was quite sure they could not, unless its progress was retarded by some obstruction. But he was prepared to try.

With his bag banging against his side he set off at a run. He could not of course see the object he was pursuing, nor, for that matter, the river, which he could hear growling and snarling in the bottom of the glen.

A run of about a quarter of a mile brought him to a place where the bank broke down again in a gentle slope to water level. Here the river broadened to a wide, almost circular pool, with a chaos of rock on one side—the side he was on—and a considerable beach of water-worn stones on the other. He

recognised the spot, for he had once fished there. It was known as The Dell. But the picture now presented was very different from when he had last seen it. Then the water had been low and clear, a friendly stream. Now, on his own side, it was a turbulent, swirling whirlpool. The force of the water as it struck the rocks was sufficient to send the main stream tearing across to the far side, to inundate the beach, which, as far as he could judge, was flooded to a depth of anything from one to three feet. The whole of this area was a tangle of dead trees, bushes, lengths of wire fencing—in fact, everything that the raging torrent could drag from the bank. There were drowned sheep, and, caught up by the antlers, a dead stag.

Cub was looking at this, mopping his face with an already soaking handkerchief, when Tony arrived, panting, mud-plastered and dishevelled. "Can you see it?" was his first question.

"I haven't looked properly yet," answered Cub, staring upstream. All sorts of rubbish was still coming down, including the mangled remains of several trees. When these struck the rocks, he observed, they were carried by the stream to the far side, to be piled up with the rest in comparatively calm water. But which of these trees was the one he hoped to find—if indeed it was there at all—could not at first sight be determined.

"Did it get here before us do you think?" asked Tony.

Cub shook his head, "Goodness knows, but I think it must have done. It was pretty certain to if it didn't get caught up on the way." His eyes examined in more detail the tangle on the beach. With branches he was not concerned, but concentrated his attention on the trunks. Unfortunately, one silver birch is very like another, and while he saw several, any of which might have been the one, identification was practically impossible. His eyes went over each in turn, hoping to see the one thing that would help him, a hole. Finally they rested on one that floated in shallow water a little apart from the rest, as if it might have been a late arrival. It was being turned over and over, slowly, by the action of miniature waves. Then, even as he watched it, he saw the very thing he hardly dared to hope for—a hole. It broke the surface, spilling water, and then disappeared as the log completed its turn.

"There it is!" he shouted, pointing.

"Are you sure?" asked Tony, in a voice shrill with astonishment and joy.

"No, I'm not," admitted Cub candidly. "Ours couldn't be the only tree with a hole in it. But there's certainly a hole in that one, and about in the right place, too."

"Can we get across to it?"

"Not a hope."

"How infuriating, to be so near and yet so helpless," moaned Tony.

"The only way we can get to it is by going back the way we came and crossing the bridge," announced Cub. "And what's more," he added, "the rain's getting worse, and it's going to get worse still. That means the river will rise, in which case the tree will float off again."

"All right. Let's go round," urged Tony.

Cub looked at him. "You must be pretty tired?"

"I am," confessed Tony. "I'm also pretty wet, but there is this about it, I can't get any wetter. Let's go. Don't wait for me. You go on and I'll follow as fast as I can."

This was such a sensible suggestion that Cub did not argue the point. "Okay," he agreed. "I'll push on and meet you over there. I'll collect my rod on the way." He set off.

What with the rain, now falling heavily, and the bad going, it was a weary walk, but no worse than he expected. His mackintosh was a mere rag. He found his rod where he had left it, trudged on, crossed the bridge, and began what was really a return journey down the other bank. He could see Tony across the water plodding along, and as they passed he gave him a wave. What he did not see was Smith and Gray sheltering from the rain under the outer arch of the bridge. Had he seen them he might have acted differently, but he didn't even glance that way, so he went on unaware of their proximity. If the truth must be told, in the excitement of the chase he had forgotten all about them. His one concern was to get to The Dell before a further rise in the water could defeat his object. The rain, heavy thunder rain, was now pelting down. The sky was a flat leaden ceiling just over his head. In fact, the weather conditions had reached a stage so bad that they no longer troubled him. The air was heavy and oppressive, and regardless of the downpour he flung open his waterproof to cool off.

Gazing ahead, he saw his objective come into view, and spurred on by success in sight he broke into a trot for the last hundred yards. His feet and legs were already as wet as they could be so he splashed straight out across the submerged beach, relieved to find that the water was only knee deep. He saw that several more uprooted trees had floated in to join the mass of debris, and he had to turn several of them over before he found the one he wanted. The hole occurred in the right place, but even so, that was not conclusive proof that it was *the* tree. He would soon find out. Seizing it, he towed it through the water to dry land and thrust his hand into the hole. He did not expect to find anything; nor did he—except a hollow surrounded by

rotten wood. This was encouraging, for had the hole been only a short one he would have known at once that he had salvaged the wrong tree. The hole in the proper tree was five feet deep, as he had proved. Reaching for his chopper he set to work to cut through the base of the trunk. This, he thought, should enable him to reach the object that had cost Doctor Lander his life—if it was there. The tree, about a foot in diameter, was hollow, anyway, so the job should not take long. Swinging his chopper he sent the chips flying.

So interested was he in his task that he paid no attention to anything else; and he was about half-way through the trunk, with hollow interior exposed, when a faint hail reaching his ear caused him to look upstream, the direction whence it came. The first thing he saw was Tony, running at what seemed a quite unnecessary speed towards him. Then he saw the reason. From out of some undergrowth, a bare fifty yards behind him, appeared Smith and Gray, also running.

In all his desperate enterprises during the war Cub never thought faster than he did at that moment. First he threw his chopper into a convenient heap of rubbish. Then he kicked the chips aside and turned the tree over so that the hole he had made was on the underside. This done, from his pocket he took two spare gut casts and unwinding them at feverish speed twisted them about the tree in the most natural manner possible in the time at his disposal. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Tony arrive, breathless, and looking scared. "Take it easy," hissed Cub. "Don't say a word. Leave this to me."

The two men, when they saw Cub, slowed down to a walk, so that by the time they actually arrived on the scene, Cub, to all appearances, was carefully unwinding a gut cast and coiling it on the fingers of his left hand. Appearing to notice the men for the first time he looked up, said: "Hello—lovely weather, isn't it?" and went on with his task.

For perhaps a minute no one spoke. Cub straightened his back, arranged the gut cast neatly and put it in his breast pocket. Then, as if noticing that Tony was out of breath, he asked, with simulated surprise, "What's wrong? Why the hurry?"

Tony gulped. "I thought—I thought these men were running after me."

Cub laughed. "I thought you must have been chased by a bull or something. Why should these gentlemen run after you?"

Gray broke in. "He's right. We were running after him."

Cub's eyebrows went up. "Why?"

"We thought this river was no place for a boy on a day like this. It's dangerous. He ought to go home."

"True enough," agreed Cub. "But don't worry, I'll take care of him. I shall be going home myself presently. I've had about enough of this." His one anxiety, of course, was for the men to go so that he could complete what he had begun. As far as the weather was concerned, he spoke the truth when he said he had had enough of it. Inwardly he was fuming at the interruption.

"What are you doing?" asked Gray curiously.

It was on the tip of Cub's tongue to say: "What's that got to do with you?" But he thought better of it. "Trying to recover some gut from this confounded tree," he answered, taking the second cast in his hand and following it along to the end preparatory to winding it. "Gut costs money these days—if you can get it," he added.

Still the two men made no move to go. "You guys must be crazy on fishing to come out on a day like this," drawled Smith, in a voice in which Cub thought he detected a note of suspicion.

"All fishermen are slightly mad," he answered carelessly. "What about yourselves?" he went on sarcastically. "What are you doing here, anyway? You haven't even the excuse of fishing."

"We didn't know it was going to turn out like this," growled Gray.

"Neither did I," returned Cub, feeling that he had scored a point.

"We'll walk back with you," offered Gray, for no apparent reason.

Now this, of course, was the very last thing Cub wanted. It put him in a dilemma. He had no intention of walking home with the men; and had no intention of leaving his precious tree. He took the only course open to him. If he had to stay there all night, he decided, he would exhaust the patience of these fellows, so that they would have to go home without him. But for the look of the thing he would have to find an excuse. He found one, literally, in his hand. "Well, as I'm already as wet as I can be I might as well have another cast or two while I'm here," he announced. "This is the sort of place a fish might lie in a spate. They won't face the main stream, that's certain." Picking up his rod he began to pull off some line in readiness for casting. "You'd better stand clear," he warned the men. "People have lost an eye before today standing too close to a fly fisher."

The men backed away and Cub began to fish. And he had every intention of fishing until the men did go. With the secret of the tree practically in his grasp he refused absolutely to leave it.

As he expected, the two men soon got tired of standing watching an apparent lunatic doing the same thing over and over again in a futile attempt to catch a fish. Cub wondered why they waited at all. Could it be that they suspected his real purpose in coming to the river? No, that was impossible—

or was it? Suppose they had learned that he was fishing the beat where Doctor Lander had been murdered, on the same afternoon? They would only have to look at the roster in the hall, on which the fishing arrangements were put down daily by Macnaughton, to find that out. So thought Cub, while the men stood watching him. However, a final downpour of rain, in the nature of a cloudburst, did the trick. Without saying another word they turned and strode away.

Cub went on fishing, but to Tony he said, in a low voice, "Watch where they go."

"They're going straight across the field to the road," said Tony presently. Then again: "I can't see them any longer for the rain."

That was enough for Cub. Throwing down the rod he picked up the chopper, turned the tree over and in a few strokes completed the task he had begun. That is to say he exposed enough of the hollow inside of the tree for him to insert a hand and arm. "You keep watch in case those stiffs come back," he told Tony crisply, as he dropped on his knees and felt in the hole.

(See p. 67.)

He dropped on his knees and felt in the hole.

The first discovery he made was—a minor point that he had forgotten—the hole was full of water; so he had to roll the log over to get most of it out. This done he tried again. “Whatever is in here must be soaking wet,” he told Tony. “If it’s paper it will be pulp.”

Tony did not answer. He kept close watch on the field, but this did not prevent him from snatching an occasional glance at Cub, who was now

groping about in the hollow tree.

For a moment, while his hopes sank, Cub could feel nothing but soft, rotten wood. Then his fingers closed over a small, hard, flat object. He drew it out. It was an ordinary common cigarette tin of a popular brand, the sort made to hold twenty cigarettes. It was fastened securely with a band of adhesive tape. With a grunt of disappointment he put it down beside him and tried again; and it did not take long for him to satisfy himself that there was nothing else. "That's all," he said, picking up the tin as he rose to his feet. "This must be it."

Tony made no attempt to conceal his chagrin. "All this terrible trouble for *that*," he muttered.

"It all depends what's inside it," Cub pointed out.

"What *is* in it?"

Cub hesitated. "Not much, anyhow," he replied, testing the tin by its weight. "I should say it's a paper of some sort," he added.

"Open it."

"I'm tempted to, but if I do, in this storm whatever is in it will be soaked; if it's paper, and I think it must be, it may be ruined," asserted Cub, practically. "We'd better wait till we get home, when we can do the thing properly. Another hour won't make any difference. I think I'd better hang on to it." He put the tin in his breast pocket. "Come on," he continued, picking up his rod. "Let's get home."

Tony did not demur. The suggestion was obviously the only sensible one.

Well satisfied with the successful conclusion of an expedition that had begun so badly Cub struck off along the river bank, Tony keeping pace with him.

"Where did you run into Smith and Gray?" inquired Cub.

"By the bridge. I didn't see them there so I think they must have been under it. I heard a shout, and looking round saw them running after me. I must admit that I panicked, and ran for my life after you."

"That was a pity in a way," returned Cub. "I'm afraid it will tell them that you're scared of them, and if so they're bound to wonder why. In that case they may stumble on the truth—that we suspect them of being concerned with your father's death. However, it can't be helped."

"I didn't stop to think," admitted Tony. "I was afraid they'd do me in."

"I don't think they'd have done that," said Cub thoughtfully. "They must have known I wasn't far away. They probably wanted to talk to you, but they

didn’t want to say anything in front of me. It doesn’t matter.”

They walked on.

CHAPTER VI

STRANGE REVELATIONS

AFTERNOON tea was being served in the lounge when Cub and Tony got back to the hotel. Smith and Gray were there, also a number of disgruntled holiday makers. Cub and Tony each had a cup of tea without sitting down and then went upstairs for a hot bath and a change of clothes. "Come to my room as soon as you're ready," Cub told Tony as they parted in the corridor.

Twenty minutes later Tony arrived in Cub's room, no worse for his wetting. He found Cub sitting on his bed with the cigarette tin beside him. "I see you haven't opened it yet?" said Tony, indicating the tin.

"No," replied Cub. "It isn't mine. It's your property, and it's up to you to decide what to do with it."

Said Tony, without hesitation: "We'll see what's inside for a start."

Picking up the tin he stripped off the adhesive tape and opened it. Inside, filling the tin, was an envelope of oiled silk. This he unfolded with some impatience to disclose a slim, beautifully made little card case, of wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl and obviously of Oriental workmanship. "I've seen this before," he remarked. "It used to be in a cabinet in our bungalow in Siam." He opened the case. Inside was a piece of white paper which had been folded to a rectangle about two inches long by half that width. This turned out to be a blank sheet, but inside was another precisely similar piece of paper, folded in the same way. Tony opened it out flat, looked at it for a moment and then handed it to Cub. "That's all," he said, in a curious flat voice which revealed the extent of his disappointment.

Cub took the delicate object, for the paper was as flimsy as tissue, and laying it across the palm of his left hand gazed at it for several seconds without speaking. The truth was he hardly knew what to say. His disappointment was reflected in his face. He was, in fact, tongue-tied by a slightly ridiculous feeling of anti-climax. This, then, was the fruits of all their toil. This was the seed of a tragedy that had ended in murder. It was hard to believe. There were some marks on the paper it is true, but they were of such a nature that they conveyed nothing to him—nor, apparently, to Tony. The most conspicuous object was a black square, in the upper left hand corner. From this, in an irregular line, ran a sequence of five crosses. At an angle from these was a small circle, in the centre of which had been drawn a star. Below were several lines of symbols which Cub took to be Oriental writing of some sort.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Tony.

Cub shrugged. “What could anyone make of it?”

“It must mean something.”

“Of course it does. Your father wouldn’t carry a thing like this about with him for a joke—certainly not if he knew it was likely to cost him his life. Is this Chinese writing at the bottom?”

“Ancient Siamese, I think. I’ve seen something of the sort before.”

“But what on earth are these marks?” Cub shook his head. “I don’t get it at all.” He pondered the problem for a little while. “I think your father must have known what these marks meant,” he went on slowly. “If so, it looks as if the secret has died with him. Does this look to you like your father’s work?”

“I’m certain it isn’t. To start with, the paper is rice paper, and whatever he wanted to write he would hardly be likely to use that, although the stuff is common enough in the East. The ink is Oriental, too—Chinese ink dries a dead black, like that. It isn’t put on with a pen, but with a fine brush.”

Cub drew a deep breath. “Well, this may mean nothing to us, but it must mean a lot to the people who are so anxious to get hold of it. It certainly doesn’t provide the clue I was hoping to find. As it is, it’s no use to us. What are you going to do with it?”

“Perhaps I’d better burn it,” suggested Tony. “Anything rather than let these murderers get it.”

“I wouldn’t be in too big a hurry to do that,” advised Cub.

“It’s maddening to think that this ridiculous thing cost my father his life,” said Tony bitterly.

“I don’t think you can call it ridiculous until you know what it means,” argued Cub. “Suppose I take care of it for the time being? Later on we might find someone able to translate this message at the bottom—if it is a message.”

“You can keep it as far as I’m concerned,” asserted Tony despondently.

Cub refolded the paper, opened the back of his watch, slipped it in and snapped it shut. “It’s as safe there as anywhere for the time being,” he observed. “What I’m afraid of is, Smith and Gray will never rest until they’ve made absolutely certain that you haven’t got it. Just a minute though. I’ve got an idea!”

“What is it?”

“We might let them *think* they’ve got it. That could save you from being stabbed one dark night.”

“How?”

"By making up a false message. I don't think these crooks can ever have seen the real thing. We've got a blank sheet of rice paper. We could make some marks on it, similar, but not quite the same as the real thing."

"Then what?"

"We could put it somewhere where they might find it."

"Such as?"

"In your father's room—under the mattress, for instance. I think it's quite likely that they'll make another search. We could try it, anyway. If it fails we'll think of something else. The point is, if they find the thing they may clear off."

"All right," agreed Tony, but without enthusiasm. "You do it. But I hate the idea of them just going off. I want to see them hanged."

"So do I," declared Cub. "But they're not likely to hang on the meagre evidence that we've got. Surely it's better that they should go away than you should lose your life trying to preserve something that's no earthly use to you?"

"I suppose you're right," murmured Tony reluctantly.

With his fountain pen, which happened to have a broad nib, Cub set to work on the blank sheet of paper. When he was satisfied with the result he allowed it to dry, and then, having folded it, he repacked the cigarette tin to all appearances precisely as it had been found. "It's a queer business," observed Cub as he worked. "This thing must be of some value or your father wouldn't have gone to the trouble of wrapping it in oiled silk to keep it dry. It's lucky he did, or it would have been pulp by now. Well, there you are. Put it in your father's room."

Tony went off, but was soon back, the room being only a little way along the corridor. "I've put it under the mattress at the head of the bed," he announced.

Cub glanced at him over his shoulder, for he was standing, hands in pockets, gazing out of the window, which overlooked the front of the hotel. "It's no use worrying," he said quietly. "I can't think of anything else we can do."

"I know—that's what makes me so fed up," replied Tony.

Cub, who was still gazing out of the window, remarked casually: "The London train must be in. A new guest has just arrived. He doesn't look like a fisherman."

"A friend of Smith and Gray perhaps," surmised Tony.

"Somehow I don't think so—at least, he doesn't strike me that way."

A moment later there was a tap on the door and Ina put her head in. “Oh, there you are, sir,” she said, addressing Tony. “I was looking for you. There’s a gentleman asking for you.”

“For me?” questioned Tony, looking surprised.

“Yes, sir. He said, ‘Mr. Lander junior’.”

Tony looked at Cub. “It’s somebody who knows my father’s dead, anyway,” he said softly.

Said Cub to Ina: “Where is this gentleman?”

“Waiting in the hall.”

Cub looked at Tony. “You’d better ask him to come here. You can’t talk in the hall or in the public lounge.”

“All right. Will you please bring him here, Ina,” Tony told the maid.

“Very well.”

One glance at the new arrival, when, presently, he was shown in, and Cub’s nerves relaxed. It was the man he had seen getting out of the station car a few minutes before. He was a typical, black-coated Englishman, and when he introduced himself as Mr. Hawkins, of Messrs. Hawkins & Co., Solicitors, of Staple Inn, London, he understood.

Tony introduced himself, and Cub, saying that he was a friend who had been very kind to him. Could he remain?

Mr. Hawkins said he had no objection. On receipt of Tony’s telegram he had made a special journey up. “My business will not take long,” he went on. “If you don’t mind I’ll proceed with it at once because I should like, if possible, to catch the night train back to town.”

“Please sit down and go ahead,” invited Tony.

“First, I must say how very sorry we were to learn of the death by accident of your father,” continued Mr. Hawkins. “Please accept my condolences. I will say no more about that because for you the subject must be a very painful one. My chief purpose in coming here is to deal with the practical side of the tragedy. The living must be provided for. My instructions from my firm are to give you all the help possible. You will need money to carry you along until your father’s will is proved. He was, as you may or may not know, very comfortably off, and everything will in due course come to you. In the meantime, with your approval, we will make you a regular allowance to live on. We suggest six pounds a week. If you need more no doubt it can be arranged. I have brought you a sum of ready money to go on with. Your hotel bill, and the expenses in connection with the

funeral, and any other accounts that may come in, should be sent direct to us."

"Thank you," said Tony. "It was thoughtful of you to arrange this. I had no money, of course."

"What are your plans—or haven't you had time to make any?"

"For the moment I shall stay on here with my friend, Mr. Peters," replied Tony. "At any rate until after the funeral, which is tomorrow."

"I see. Well, keep in touch with us, and notify us of any change of address," requested the solicitor. "I have one more item to deal with." From his portfolio he took a sealed letter. "Your father left this with us with instructions that it should be handed to you, personally, should anything—er—unfortunate—happen to him. A strange request. I mean, it would almost seem as if he had a feeling that something might happen. If that was so, he did not confide in us."

"Then you know nothing about the contents of this letter?"

"Nothing. Here it is. Please sign here."

Tony signed the receipt form and put the letter on the dressing table.

The solicitor stood up. "And now, having discharged our duty in this matter, I'll be getting back, as I have a number of important appointments tomorrow. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss with me?"

Tony thought for a moment. "No, sir, I don't think so. I'm sorry you had to come all this way."

"There was no alternative," replied the lawyer. "Your father's instructions about the letter were definite. They were that a member of the firm put the letter into your hands literally, as quickly as possible. I caught the first train. Otherwise, of course, we could have sent it by post. And now, if you'll excuse me, I just have time to catch my train, so I'll say good night."

"Good night, sir, and thank you again," returned Tony.

"Well, that was pretty quick work," murmured Cub after the lawyer had gone out, closing the door behind him.

"It certainly was," agreed Tony, picking up the letter. "I wonder what this is about?"

"Suppose you read it and find out?"

"I wonder has it any bearing on what's happened?"

"Seems more than likely," surmised Cub.

Tony broke the seal, opened the envelope, withdrew the contents, and smoothed flat several sheets of closely written paper. "There's plenty of it at

any rate," he observed.

"Is that your father's handwriting?"

"Yes."

There was silence while Tony perused the first few lines. Then he looked up at Cub. In a voice that was not quite steady he said: "I think I'd better read this aloud. I fancy it's going to explain everything."

Cub nodded. "Go ahead. I'm listening."

Tony began to read. " 'My dear boy, I hope you will never receive this letter, for if you do, it will mean that my enemies have overtaken me. In that unhappy event it is as well that you should know the reason, for upon this knowledge may your own life depend. What action you take as a result of the disclosures I am about to make I must leave to your discretion. Such advice as I can give you now is this: do nothing until you are grown up and better able to deal with a situation more perilous than you might at first suppose. It might be better for you to do nothing at any time, but forget the whole thing. But having read this letter you will at least have some understanding of what would otherwise remain a mystery to worry you all your life. Often you must have thought my behaviour strange. Now you will appreciate why it could hardly be otherwise.

" 'My story begins some time before the Japanese invasion of our adopted country. I had built up a very remunerative practice, for having specialised in tropical diseases—the original reason for what was to be a short visit to Siam—I soon acquired a reputation that brought me patients from the most influential people in the land. And some of these were very rich indeed. One was a Mr. Kashan Bhandu, whom in future I shall merely call Kashan, for short. That was the name by which I knew him. You may remember hearing me speak of him to your mother. He had made a vast fortune out of teak, the timber which the country exports; but in later years, foolishly, as I think, he turned his interest to politics. He was, I may say, a man both charming and cultured, if a trifle eccentric, and it was my good fortune to be able to cure him of a serious malady. As a result we became firm friends. This may have been due, also, to some extent, because he knew he could trust me. I was British, and he knew at least that I had no political axe to grind. Having made enemies, political and industrial, he did not know who else he could trust—so he once told me. He remained unmarried, and as far as I know, had no living relations. In spite of his great wealth, he was not, therefore, a happy man. But the fact remains, we got on very well, and he often took me into his confidence.

“ ‘I must tell you that there was at this time, living in Bangkok, another well-known doctor, a man of the country named Tuanik. You may remember him because he came to our house to see me on two or three occasions. He claimed to be a graduate of Oxford University. This I had reason to doubt, and upon making inquiries I discovered that far from being an Oxford man he was not even a doctor. He was a charlatan, a fortune-hunting rogue, with a most unsavoury record. In some way (I don’t know how) it came to his notice that I had checked up on him, and knowing that I knew the truth he hated me as only a bad type of Oriental can hate. Really, there was no reason for this, for I did not expose him, although perhaps I should have done. For a long time he was Kashan’s medical adviser, although I was unaware of this. But it seems that his treatment did the patient more harm than good, with the result that Kashan, hearing of me, asked me to go and see him, which I did with what result I have already told you. I soon put him right, and Tuanik was told to take his quack medicines elsewhere. This, you may be sure, did nothing to increase the man’s regard for me. Indeed, I was told that he had sworn to kill me. The real trouble was, I think, Tuanik, as a result of my interference—as he called it—was no longer admitted to Kashan’s house. Even Kashan had realised that the fellow was more concerned with his wealth than with his health. Unfortunately, in his visits to Kashan’s house, Tuanik had seen enough of the treasures there to set his avarice alight. Burning for revenge, or perhaps still hoping to get Kashan’s treasure, what did Tuanik do but denounce Kashan to the government as a traitor, saying that he was a Japanese agent. He asserted that Kashan was plotting to overthrow the government with a view to getting himself set up as a dictator.

“ ‘There was not a word of truth in this. As a matter of fact Kashan was violently anti-Japanese. He was concerned only with the good of his country. Anyway, there was a first-class sensation and poor Kashan found himself in a very nasty position. He managed to clear himself of the charge, but he realised that his enemies would never rest until they had secured his downfall—and his fortune. This he took steps to protect. He did this by turning all his cash into small objects of great value, for easy transport should he find it expedient to go into hiding, or leave the country. He told me this himself, although he did not go into the details of his purchases. I only know that he had some priceless jade, of which he had been an ardent collector for many years. As for Tuanik, I was glad to notice that his knavery did him no good. After sinking pretty low he threw in his lot with one of those disreputable gangs that infest the waterfront at Bangkok for the purpose of preying on tourists.

“ ‘This was the state of affairs when the war started. After that, from all accounts, he did better, as a collaborationist with the invaders. For the rest of us, it was almost a case of every man for himself. Poor Kashan was again accused of being a traitor and a warrant went out for his arrest. Tuanik probably had a hand in that. At any rate, he arrived at Kashan’s mansion with the soldiers that were sent to arrest him. What they were really after, of course, was Kashan’s fortune. The house was ransacked from floor to ceiling. But Tuanik did not find the treasure. Kashan, knowing only too well what was likely to happen to him, had forestalled them all by burying his wealth in the jungle. He was arrested, and after a farcical trial was tortured in an attempt to make him speak; but (as I learned later) he died without opening his lips. He would. He was that sort of man. The Japs would have killed him, anyway, as he well knew, for their spies would have reported on which side his sympathies lay. And as I have said, he was an important man.

“ ‘Only one man actually knew where the treasure was hidden, and it was me. It came about in this way. Late at night, just before our departure, there arrived at my bungalow one of Kashan’s personal servants, a man named Kling—you may remember him. He brought a letter. In it Kashan told me what he had done with his treasure. With the letter was a curious chart, or map, showing where he had hidden it. Knowing that this would be found on him when he was arrested he asked me to take care of it. If he was killed, then he hoped I would recover the treasure after the war and keep it as a souvenir of our friendship. In case there should be any argument in the Siamese courts on the question of ownership, he had added to the chart, in his own handwriting, and signed by him, what is, in effect, a will, making me his sole heir. This chart needed an explanation, a key, so to speak, to make it understandable, and that was contained in the letter, which he advised me to burn after I had read it. After memorising this information I did burn it, for I was by no means sure that I should be able to get out of the country myself; and had I been caught I should have been searched when the document would have been found.

“ ‘At the time I was by no means pleased with this extra responsibility, at a period which, with the Japanese on the doorstep so to speak, everything was in a state of hopeless confusion. I was more concerned with saving ourselves, my life and yours. However, as you know, we were lucky enough to get away. The chart I put in the little card case from the cabinet in the lounge. It was in my pocket when we reached England. As I write I still have it.

“ ‘How Tuanik and his villainous friends learned that I had this strange document I do not know. The only explanation that I can think of is, the

servant who brought the letter to me must have been caught, and under torture told all he knew, although how far he was in Kashan's confidence I do not know. He may have been the one who helped Kashan to conceal the treasure, for some help would be needed. I do not know. Even if Tuanik only discovered that a letter had been brought to me he would guess the rest. Be that as it may, Tuanik learned that I possessed the secret of Kashan's treasure. I did not know this at the time. I only learned of it after the war was over, and I was planning to return to Siam. We were then living in an hotel in Bournemouth. There Tuanik found me. Possibly he got my address from the Siamese Office in London. At any rate, he turned up at Bournemouth with his two particular cronies, told me that he knew I had had a letter from Kashan, and had the calm effrontery to demand it. Naturally, I refused to give it to him. He said I had no right to Kashan's money, which was now the property of the State, the former owner having being condemned and executed as a traitor. I told him with some heat that the puppet government that had murdered Kashan were the traitors. In my anger I also told him, foolishly perhaps, that Kashan made a will in my favour, and as I still had it, Kashan's property would become mine when I cared to claim it.

" 'Upon my refusal to hand over the letter—which he must have guessed contained the secret of the treasure—Tuanik flew into a passion in which he made threats which I, in England, could not take seriously. I was soon to discover that these were no idle threats. I fled. He followed, and time and time again my room was broken into, either by Tuanik or his supporters. Of these accomplices, two in particular are to be feared. They were members of the most infamous waterfront gang at Bangkok. Only God knows how many murders they have on their hands. One calls himself Smith, although that is probably not his real name. There is reason to believe that he is a deserter from the U.S. Navy who is wanted in his own country for murder. He is an elderly man with more than a streak of negro blood, made evident by the yellow in the whites of his eyes and an almost boneless nose. He has a scar on his right cheekbone. The other is a flashy little Eurasian-Siamese who goes by the name of Gray. His record is as black as Smith's.

" 'Well, my son, that is the story. Now you know why I never stayed long in one place, and why I did not return to Siam. Had I gone there I should most certainly have been murdered. As for Kashan's treasure, I am determined that whatever happens these rascals shall not have it. I owe that to my poor friend. Twice I have been knocked down, but each time help came before Tuanik could find what he sought, which I carried in the lining of my jacket. You will probably think I was foolish to carry such an important document about with me, but if only for sentimental reasons I

could not bear to part with it. If these fiends have not killed me it is only because they fear they might lose for ever the object which they are so anxious to obtain. But Tuanik is never far away. He follows us wherever we go.

" 'Memorise, as I did, the key to the chart, which I have written below, then burn this letter. If you wish, destroy everything—that is, assuming that the cigarette tin which contains the chart has come into your possession. It may not. Tuanik may get it after all. But even if he does—although he is unaware of this—it will not avail him, for alone, without the explanation, it is useless; a safety device which Kashan was careful to make. I also enclose a copy of the chart in case Tuanik succeeds in getting the original. Apart from the chart, Tuanik is now very anxious to secure the will, for if he could destroy that I should have no legal claim to the treasure. Morally, however, it would still be mine, and if anything should happen to me it will become yours. That was Kashan's wish. Such precautions as I have taken, therefore, are to ensure that even if the will is destroyed, you, and you alone, will be in possession of both the chart and its explanation. If, later on, you care to try your luck in Siam, go, and my good wishes for your success will go with you. That is all. God bless you.

" 'Now, here is the key to the chart. Memorise it, and destroy this paper utterly.

" '*The square.* This represents the ancient ruins of a temple in the jungle two miles east of the little *kampong* of Tankoy, which, you may remember, is about eighty miles from Bangkok, and is reached by a track leading off the main road. You will I think recall this track because on one or two occasions you went with me to Kashan's country estate. The house is reached by a cutting in the forest to the left of this same track. There is, I understand, a jungle path from Tankoy to the temple, all that remains of a once wide road. *The crosses.* These represent palm trees. *The circle.* This marks the site of an old tomb. The star in the centre marks the position of Kashan's treasure. These were the instructions in the letter from Kashan which I destroyed. I have not seen the place myself, never having been past his house. The scale relative to the chart is all-important. It is this—a typical Oriental fancy. The length of one grain of rice equals ten paces. This supplies the necessary measurements.' "

Tony finished reading and looked up. "Well, now we know," he said simply. "What a rat this fellow Tuanik must be."

Cub nodded. "Put the letter in your pocket and we'll go down to dinner. We'll read it again afterwards. I heard the gong go ten minutes ago."

“I’d rather you kept it,” requested Tony. “It will be safer with you.”

“Okay,” agreed Cub, rising, and putting the letter in his pocket.

At this moment the door opened and Ina looked in. “It’s supper time,” she said smiling. “I thought perhaps you didn’t hear the gong.”

“Yes, we heard it, thank you; we’re coming down now,” answered Cub.

The girl looked at Tony. “There’s been a gentleman asking for you, sir. I said you’d be down any minute.”

Tony looked puzzled. “Asking for me? You don’t mean the one . . . ?”

“No, not the gentleman who came up here. This is an old friend of your father’s, he says, when you lived abroad—a brown man. He says his name is Doctor Tuanik.”

CHAPTER VII

TUANIK SHOWS HIS HAND

AFTER INA had gone Tony turned to Cub a face that wore a curious expression of alarm and indignation. "Did you hear that?" he breathed. "A friend of my father's, he says. What a nerve!"

"It's lucky we read your father's letter before this happened," said Cub. "At least we've got our clock set right. Apparently Tuanik isn't satisfied with the way things are going so he's come along to take charge himself."

"If he says one word to me——" began Tony fiercely.

"Wait a minute," interposed Cub quietly. "That won't do. We've got to beat this rat at his own game. If you take my advice you'll put on an act and pretend you know nothing—nothing at all. Let him make the first move. We'll see what happens." Cub became deadly serious. "Now you mark my words. If you give that crook cause to think that you know as much as you do your life won't be worth living—if you go on living at all. But we'd better go down to dinner. Come on; we'll talk more about this afterwards."

They went down to the dining-room. Smith and Gray were there, with Tuanik sharing their table. Tuanik threw Tony a smile—a smile apparently intended to be one of friendly recognition—in passing. Tony nodded, but his attempt at a return smile was a failure.

The meal proceeded normally until coffee was served, and then Tuanik came over and put a hand on Tony's shoulder. "It's so good to see you again," he said, in smooth English. "But this is terrible news about your father. I have just heard. I was most upset. We were such friends in the old days, you know."

Tony's face turned pale, but with Cub's eyes on him he held himself in hand. "Yes," was all he could get out, in a stifled sort of voice.

"I was hoping to see him," went on Tuanik, in his even, monotonous voice. "In fact, I made a special journey from Siam for that purpose, at the request of the Siamese government. Then, even as I was about to start from London, came this dreadful news. My poor boy. What can I say? I understand the funeral is tomorrow? I shall attend, of course. Meanwhile, as there is a chance that you may be able to help me I wonder if you could spare me a few minutes of your time after dinner, in my private sitting-room? I am sure your friend won't mind."

Tuanik flashed at Cub a set of perfect teeth in a mirthless smile.

Tony hesitated only for an instant. "Of course," he agreed.

The embarrassing silence which followed was broken in a most extraordinary and unexpected manner, to prove, as it is so often proved, that the best laid plans of mice and men go wrong. Ina, smiling as usual, came to the table. “Excuse me, sir,” she said, speaking to Tony, “we’ve just had a telegram asking for accommodation for the night and I’m afraid we shall have to have Doctor Lander’s room. When the girls were turning out they found this under the mattress. It must have belonged to the Doctor. I thought I’d give it to you straight away in case it got mislaid.” She held out the cigarette tin which Tony had himself put in the bed.

Only by the slightest twitch of the nostrils did Tony reveal that the tin meant anything to him. He took it with a word of thanks and put it in his pocket. But Cub was watching Tuanik, and saw his eyes gleam.

Cub finished his coffee. To Tony he said: “You go and have a word with —er——?”

“Doctor Tuanik is my name.”

“Have a word with the Doctor,” continued Cub. “I’ll be about when you’ve finished. You see,” he explained to Tuanik, “we’ve been together quite a lot since the accident. Tony was by himself, so I thought. . . .”

“Quite so—quite so,” murmured Tuanik.

Tony got up. “I’ll see you presently,” he told Cub, and followed by Tuanik left the room.

Cub waited for a few minutes and then found a seat on the settee in the hall, which commanded a view of the corridor, and the door of the private sitting-room. Not that he thought there would be trouble at this juncture. Tuanik would hardly be likely to use force in the sitting-room, which was next to Macnaughton’s office. It was more likely that he would continue in his role of benevolent friend, while it suited him. Cub was more anxious about Tony, who would find the interview difficult, and might, in a moment of anger, say too much. But apparently this did not happen, for when, about half an hour later, Tony appeared in the corridor, with Tuanik showing him out, they seemed to be on the best of terms.

Tony joined Cub. “Better not talk here,” he said softly. “Let’s go upstairs.”

“If we spend too much time in my room Tuanik will begin to wonder what’s going on,” observed Cub, as they went up.

“We’ll come down again presently and sit in the public lounge for a bit,” suggested Tony. “But I must tell you what he said. For one thing, he wanted to know who you were,” he went on, as Cub closed the door behind them.

“What did you tell him?”

"I told him I really knew nothing about you, which, come to think of it, was perfectly true," answered Tony. "I said you were a friend I'd met here and that you had been very kind and helpful in my trouble. And do you know what he said to that?"

"Tell me."

"He had the cheek to advise me, in deadly earnest, to be careful of strangers. Coming from him I thought that was pretty rich."

Cub smiled. "I should say so. Go on."

"He said he remembered seeing me in Siam—and all that. He was caught by the Japs and had a terrible time. That was all lies, of course. We happen to know he was a Jap spy. However, he finally got to the purpose of his supposed mission to see my father. His story was this. My father had been a very important man in Siam and he was therefore in touch with some very influential men. That was true, as far as it goes. When my father left the country in such a hurry he took with him—by accident, of course—a valuable document which was the property of the Siamese government. No doubt my father would have discovered it in due course. Perhaps he had forgotten it, or possibly he didn't realise how important it was. He Tuanik, had been sent to fetch it. Had my father said anything to me about it? I told him no. Could I help in anyway, he said. I asked him how I could help. He said, by allowing him to go through my father's things. I said I couldn't do that because the lawyers would have to have everything to settle up my father's affairs. Even I was not supposed to touch the things. The lawyer had just been to see me—as he could confirm."

Cub nodded. "That was good. Go on."

"He seemed very anxious to find out if I knew anything about my father's business, and he asked a lot of awkward questions, but I put him off as well as I could. I assured him that my father never mentioned his business to me, and had never mentioned a Siamese document—which was true. I pointed out that at the time we left Siam I was still little more than an infant, and with that he had to agree. He asked me if I knew what my father had in his pockets when he fell in the river—as he put it. I told him I had never seen the things, which were still at the police station. Finally, he came to the tin Ina gave me at dinner. I guessed he would."

"That was a queer bit of luck, Ina arriving at that moment," put in Cub. "What had he to say about that?"

"He wanted me to open it to see what was in it. I told him I couldn't do that. I had no right to do it. It would have to be put with my father's effects and the lawyers would deal with it in due course."

"You might have let him have it," said Cub thoughtfully.

"To tell the truth, I did think of that, but I couldn't be sure that I was doing the right thing. It struck me that if I just gave it to him he might get suspicious. After all, why should I give my father's things to anybody who asked for them? It isn't reasonable."

"True enough," agreed Cub. "Perhaps it's as well as it is. We'll try to arrange a way of letting him have it tomorrow. You might tell him you'll ring up the lawyers, after the funeral, to hear what they have to say about it. He couldn't object to that and it would keep him quiet for the time being. Anything else?"

"No, I think that was about all."

"All right. Then let's go down to the lounge and talk about fishing or something," suggested Cub. "There's one thing you'd better do first, though. And that's burn your father's letter, and the copy of the chart." He produced them from his pocket. "You'll remember what these symbols stand for?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"I shall remember them, anyway," said Cub, and putting the two documents in the fireplace he put a match to them and watched the papers burn to cinders. These he crushed to dust with his foot. "So much for that," he remarked.

They went down, and the rest of the evening was made easier by the fact that neither Smith nor Gray were in the lounge. They were, presumably, with their leader in his private sitting-room. At any rate, they did not return to the lounge, and when eleven o'clock came Cub decided that they might as well go to bed. The next day would be a miserable one for Tony, for in the morning the ordeal of the funeral would have to be faced.

They went upstairs together and parted in the corridor. Not until he was half undressed did Cub remember that Tony still had the cigarette tin in his pocket. His first thought was to fetch it, but on secondary consideration he decided that, as it would do Tuanik no good if he got it, he might as well leave the thing where it was. He finished undressing and got into bed.

He was just dozing off when he was brought to full consciousness again by the ringing of the front door bell. For a moment he wondered who it could be at that hour; then he remembered what Ina had said about a telegram booking rooms and decided that it must be the new arrival. Turning over he tried to go to sleep again, but as so often happens, having been aroused, his brain started working, and far from sleeping he became more and more awake. As he lay there, saying hard things about people who

announced their arrival at an hotel by waking others who had gone to bed, he heard a board creak. The sound came from the corridor. That someone had passed along it was certain, and it was not the new people or there would have been more noise. In all probability there would have been talking, too. It had sounded more like somebody trying to walk quietly. He sat up, listening intently. Presently he heard another sound, a low whispering, not far away.

In the ordinary course of events he would have taken no notice, for such sounds are common enough in hotels. But the circumstances were not ordinary, and a feeling of uneasiness grew on him. What was going on? Sleep he could not until he had found out. Getting out of bed he slipped on his dressing-gown and as quietly as possible opened the door. The light was on, but no one was in sight; but he could still hear talking, and the voices came, if not actually from Tony's room, then from one very close to it. A few steps took him to Tony's door. It was shut. A voice spoke. He recognised it as Tony's. That could only mean that someone was there, and it did not take him long to work out who it was most likely to be. Very quietly he opened the door a few inches and looked in. The light was on and a glance confirmed his suspicions. Tony was there, of course, in his pyjamas. He was standing with his back to the window. His face was pale. Confronting him were Tuanik and Gray.

Quiet though he had been, Cub must have made a sound—or Tuanik may have seen his reflection in the dressing-table mirror, which was opposite the door. At any rate, he swung round. "Yes, what do you want?" he asked sharply, obviously angry at the interruption.

(See p. 93.)

Very quietly he opened the door and looked in.

Cub pushed the door open and went in. “I just remembered something I wanted to speak to Tony about,” he answered. Then, to Tony he said: “What is all this? What’s going on?”

“It’s none of your business,” snapped Tuanik, now definitely hostile.

"That's where you're wrong," returned Cub evenly. "It so happens that I've made this boy's business my business." Looking at Tony again he went on: "What is it?"

Tony did not answer at once. He was staring wide-eyed at Cub, lips parted, on his face an expression of the most acute alarm. Cub had a feeling that the boy was trying to tell him something, convey a message with his eyes; but he did not get it, and in order to help him he asked: "Is everything all right here?"

Tony found his voice at last. "They say I've got something that belongs to them and I've got to give it to them."

"Really?" returned Cub cynically. "And what is it they want?"

"That tin Ina gave me at dinner."

"And you don't want to give it to them?"

"Certainly not. It must have belonged to my father."

"It may contain something that belongs to the Siamese government," put in Tuanik curtly.

"If it's their property they'll get it in due course, no doubt," Cub told him frostily. "In any case, this isn't the way to get it. You've no right to intrude into this room. You'd better go, before I send for the management."

Tuanik's next move took Cub by surprise. Even though he knew what sort of man he had to deal with he did not think he would resort to extreme measure in such a place. But in this he was wrong. An automatic appeared suddenly in Tuanik's hand. It was, Cub noticed, fitted with a silencer.

"You stand where you are, or you'll get something that will teach you not to meddle in other people's business," said Tuanik, in a hard, threatening voice. Then, to Gray, he went on crisply. "That's enough of this fooling."

Gray moved swiftly. With unnecessary force he thrust Tony aside and picked up his jacket. He felt in the pockets and found the tin.

"Open it," snapped Tuanik, his eyes on the tin.

Now Cub had no particular reason for wanting to retain the tin, but every fibre of fighting force in him resented bitterly this apparent victory for a man whom he now regarded as an enemy. His temper, already simmering, boiled over when Gray disclosed the contents of the tin.

Tuanik snatched the paper, "That's it!" he cried in a voice of suppressed excitement. "That's what I want!"

"Is it?" snarled Cub, and jumped in. And as he jumped he struck, and the blow went home. His first caught Tuanik on the side of the face and sent him reeling. He was following up the attack when the world seemed to explode

in a cloud of sparks. His legs gave way under him and he crashed forward across a chair, taking it with him to the floor. He never entirely lost consciousness, although he must have been very near to it. He managed to get to his knees, but stand he dare not, for the room was spinning round him. As from afar he could hear Tony saying, over and over again: "Oh, why did you do that?" Then the air started to clear, and he managed to drag himself up by hanging on to the bedpost. "What was that?" he gasped.

"It was Smith," answered Tony. "He struck you from behind. He was standing behind the door all the time. That's what I was trying to tell you."

Cub shook his head and looked round the room. They were alone. Dimly, he understood. "Get me a drink of water," he requested, feeling the back of his head tenderly.

Tony brought him a glass from the carafe on the washstand. He gulped it down. "That's better," he murmured.

"What's better?" said a voice from somewhere behind him.

Cub spun round as if he had received another blow. In the doorway stood his old C.O., Captain Lorrington King, otherwise Gimlet, King of the Commandos. In the background towered the tall form of Corporal Colson, better known in his unit as Copper.

When he had finished staring Cub stammered: "Where have you come from?"

Gimlet came on into the room. "We got here about twenty minutes ago —and found ourselves locked out. I hoped you'd hear us ringing the front door bell. I came along as soon as I got your wire, and collected the corporal on the way. We've been having a bite of late supper in the kitchen. What's going on here? Have you been having a party? I seemed to see people leaving the room as I came round the corner."

"I wouldn't exactly call it a party," retorted Cub bitterly. " 'Matter of fact we've just been held up at the point of a pistol and robbed."

"The devil you have! Couldn't you do something about it?"

Cub smiled bleakly. "I tried, and got bashed on the back of the skull for my pains."

"You must be out of practice," murmured Gimlet. "Come here, and let's have a look at your head. . . . I don't think there's much harm done," he went on, after he had examined the bruise. "You've got a nasty bump coming, but the skin isn't broken. What's it all about? I didn't realise from your wire that things were as urgent as all this."

"They weren't when I sent the wire," answered Cub.

“We had decided not to disturb you tonight,” resumed Gimlet, “but it happened that as we came along the corridor I saw the door wide open, and hearing a noise, looked in.”

“But ’alf a minute,” broke in Copper. “What abaht these toughs? They couldn’t ’ave got far. Let’s get after ’em. They can’t get away with that, no bloomin’ fear, not on my oath they can’t.”

“Let them go,” returned Cub. “As it happens they haven’t got anything that matters.”

Gimlet lit a cigarette. “Would you mind telling me what all this is about?” he requested again, crisply. “Who’s this, anyway?” He looked at Tony.

Cub made the introductions. Then, turning to Tony he said: “These are the friends I was telling you about.” To Gimlet he went on, “Do you want to hear the story now or will you wait till morning? It’s a long one.”

“I think we’d better hear it now, in case there’s a repetition of these unseemly goings-on.”

“All right. Come to my room. But Tony here had better get to bed. He’s got a difficult day in front of him tomorrow. Tony, you try to get some sleep. I don’t think you’ll be disturbed again.”

Cub took Gimlet and Copper to his room, and there, for the next hour, he told them the whole strange story, beginning with how he had become involved in it. Gimlet made no comment, and nor for that matter did Copper, although there were times when it was obvious that he had to exercise great restraint.

At the finish all Gimlet said was: “Queer affair. I feel something will have to be done about it. We’ll talk about it again in the morning after we’ve all had a night’s rest. I came up by road, and it’s a long run.”

With this suggestion Cub was only too willing to agree, for now that the strain had relaxed he found it hard to keep awake.

CHAPTER VIII

GIMLET TAKES OVER

THE night passed without disturbance. Cub came down to find that Gimlet and Copper were already up, and were standing talking on the lawn in front of the hotel. He joined them, and his first question was to ask if they had seen anything of Tuanik.

"He's gone. They've all gone," answered Gimlet.

Cub stared. "Gone—gone where?" he echoed, somewhat foolishly in his surprise.

"I wouldn't know—how would I?" returned Gimlet. "All I know is what the waitress tells me. The whole party slipped off early this morning before anyone was up. When the chambermaid went to their rooms with early morning tea she found their beds had not been slept in. Their luggage had gone, so had their car, so we may presume that they've pulled out."

"Ha, that's because they've got, or think they've got, what they were after."

"No doubt," concurred Gimlet. "By the same token they may come back."

"Come back—why?"

"Because sooner or later they're bound to realise that the document they've got is either a fake or only part of the thing. It tells them nothing—at least, it does nothing to help them to locate the treasure."

"Yes, I suppose it wouldn't take them long to discover that," agreed Cub.

"They've probably discovered it already."

"Then why did they go?"

"They might have gone for several reasons. Maybe they thought you'd report last night's affair to the police. That would lead to questioning, and that must be the last thing they want. When they realise they've got a phoney chart, or one that is useless in itself, if they're not absolute fools they'll soon arrive at the correct conclusion that Tony knew more than he pretended, and probably has the real chart tucked away somewhere. They will also guess that you know all about it, which makes their task more difficult. What they'll do next is anybody's guess. They may not go far away. They may hang about on the chance of getting hold of Tony alone. On the other hand, as I just said, if it occurs to them that you or Tony might go to the police, which might lead to a suspicion that Doctor Lander's death

was not an accident, they'd probably get out of the country while the going's good."

Cub stared down at the green turf. "Having come all this way I can't see them going back without the thing they came for," he observed. "They knew Doctor Lander held the secret, and he'd be pretty sure to make provision for Tony to know about it in case anything should happen to him. But never mind what they're going to do, what can *we* do? Young Tony's life is in danger, that's certain. Sooner or later they'll get hold of him and then anything could happen. I can't very well walk out on him now."

"Of course you can't," agreed Gimlet. "The first thing, I think, is to get him away from this place. There's no reason for him to stay here."

"He won't take kindly to the idea of running away," declared Cub. "Knowing perfectly well that these people were responsible for his father's death he wants to see them brought to justice."

"Naturally. But how are you going to do that? Without some sort of evidence you haven't a hope. I don't want to stay here, anyway. My housekeeper is back so I'm going on to the lodge. You'd better come along, too, and bring Tony with you. We'll go immediately after the funeral. When we get there we'll have a conference and decide what, if anything, can be done about the whole business. There's room for all of us in my car. It might not be wise for us to be seen going off together; there's just a chance that Tuanik may be watching. He didn't see us last night so he knows nothing about us being with you. It's better he shouldn't know. You settle up with the hotel and put your bags in the back of my car. After the funeral walk on down the road. You'll find me waiting. Keep to your own table at breakfast. Tony can write to his lawyers from the lodge."

"All right," agreed Cub, and went off to find Tony to tell him the news.

And so it came about that when the melancholy funeral service was over Cub and Tony took the road leading away from the hotel. They found the car waiting a little farther on. It picked them up, and in half an hour they were in the house of mixed memories, Glencarglas Lodge, in Gimlet's lonely deer forest.[2] By the time they had unpacked it was nearly one o'clock, so after a cold lunch they foregathered in the lounge to devise a plan for Tony's immediate future.

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[2] See *Gimlet Comes Home*.

Gimlet opened the discussion. Looking at Tony he said: "Well now, laddie, have you any ideas of your own about what you're going to do, or what you'd like to do?"

"No, sir," answered Tony. "I haven't really thought about it yet . . . this has all happened so suddenly. Of course, what I really want is to see these scoundrels who killed my father brought to justice."

"Quite so," agreed Gimlet. "But how are you going to do that?"

"I've been wondering if it wouldn't be better, after all, to go to the police and tell them all I know."

Copper put in a word: "With all due respect to the Force, mate—I was in meself once, which is why they call me Copper—I doubt if that 'ud get yer what yer want. Yer see kid, in this country, before a cove can be strung up it 'as ter be proved that 'e did the job. That ain't easy at any time—my oath it ain't. I know. I've 'ad some of it. You may be pretty sure in yer own mind that your dad was done in, but you couldn't prove it, much less prove who did it. Not only that, but yer might find yerself in 'ot water fer not goin 'ter the police earlier. Cub 'ad a 'and in that I reckon?"

"I did," confessed Cub.

"Don't blame Cub—he acted for the best," protested Tony.

"Of course 'e did," agreed Copper. "I ain't sayin' 'e didn't. I should probably 'ave done the same—me as ought ter know better."

After lighting a cigarette Gimlet continued. "Tell me, Tony—you haven't thought about going to Siam to collect this—er—alleged treasure?"

Tony smiled bleakly. "No, sir. I'm afraid that would be too much of a tall order for me—until I'm a lot older, anyway. Besides, I couldn't afford it. Apart from that, someone might recognise me, and if Tuanik heard I was back, as he probably would, he'd know what I was doing and he'd soon be on my track. What hope would I have there against him and his gang? It was bad enough for my father here, and this is a civilised country."

Gimlet blew a smoke ring. "So you're not really keen on the treasure, eh? I think you should be. Apparently you've every right to it. It was left to your father, and he risked his life—and lost it—probably as much for you as for himself."

"I'm more concerned with avenging my father," returned Tony in a hard voice.

"I can quite understand that," affirmed Gimlet. "But there's no sense in hurting yourself trying to do it. One way of achieving your object would be by making certain that Tuanik and his accomplices never get Kashan's

wealth. They'll never stop trying to get it while it's lying out there in the jungle, you can bet on that."

"Yes. Yes, that's right enough," murmured Tony slowly. "I didn't think of that. But I must admit that I'm scared of this man Tuanik."

"Can you speak Siamese?"

"Almost as well as I speak English. I had a Siamese nurse."

"That should make things easier."

"Not easy enough, I'm afraid," replied Tony sadly. "Besides, as I said just now, I haven't enough money for a trip like that. I'm sure the lawyer wouldn't give me enough. He'd advise me against going, anyway."

"Yes, I think he would," admitted Gimlet. "And you couldn't blame him for that." He hesitated for a moment, knocking the ash off his cigarette. "Suppose I found the money, and went with you?"

Tony's eyes opened wide. "Do you really mean that?"

"I don't say what I don't mean," returned Gimlet drily.

"Of course, that would be an entirely different thing," declared Tony. "And if I got the treasure I could always pay you back, couldn't I? In fact, we could go shares in it. I don't really care a hang about the money as long as I can do Tuanik in the eye."

"All the same, money is a useful thing to have, which you'll learn as you grow older," remarked Gimlet, smiling faintly. "And this money, after all, is yours."

"Then you'll come with me?" Tony's voice had a new note in it.

"Why not? I've nothing to do at the moment, and doing nothing is a miserable occupation. I was thinking of taking a trip somewhere, anyhow, and it might as well be Siam as anywhere else. Cub and Copper, too, will soon be classified as a couple of spivs if they don't find themselves something useful to do."

"Men like me are only useful when there's a war on," growled Copper. "They soon find me a job then."

"All right, Tony," went on Gimlet, ignoring Copper's remark, "there's no hurry about this. My suggestion is you three fellows stay here while I go to London to see what can be arranged. You can amuse yourselves fishing while I'm away. It will be an opportunity for Copper to get his hair cut, too."

Copper looked pained. "Why, I 'ad it cut only larst week."

"What you mean is you had it tickled with a pair of scissors. I said have it cut."

Copper sighed. "Okay, sir. My old mother likes it this way though."

"Mothers always do," said Gimlet, smiling. "But you're a big boy now, and old enough to please yourself. Get—it—cut."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Tony stepped into the conversation. "If you're going to book passages, Bangkok would be the best landing place."

"As a matter of detail I may be able to fix something better than that," answered Gimlet. "It was partly because I had something else in mind that I suggested the trip. A friend of mine, whom some of you may remember, Freddy Ashton—Lord Rinborne now, to most people—has rather more money than is good for him." Gimlet glanced at Cub and Copper in turn. "You won't have forgotten Captain Ashton, I'm sure?[3] Among other things he's got a yacht, although at the moment he's in Africa, big game hunting. He's got an idea that I did him a favour a little while ago, so he told me that the yacht was at my disposal while he was away. She's at moorings in Chichester harbour. I didn't take up his offer at the time because I had nowhere in particular to go, but this, I think, is where she might come in useful. I'll get in touch with her skipper. You say Bangkok would be the best place to make for, Tony?"

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[3] See *Gimlet Mops Up*.

"Yes."

"How far is this village—what do you call it——?"

"Tankoy."

"How far is that from Bangkok?"

"About eighty miles."

"What's the best way of getting there?"

"There's only one way and that's by road. There's quite a good road for the most part, but as the village lies off the main road you have to take a side track at the finish, and that's not so good. I remember it because I went to Kashan's house with my father. It's on the same track."

"How about taking a jeep? I've got one that I bought for running about my estate down south. We could take it with us."

"I should think it would be the ideal thing for the job," asserted Tony. "It would save buying a car out there, anyway. Of course, in the monsoon all

the roads are pretty awful, and it's easy enough to get bogged. The best weather is in January and February. It might be worth waiting until then."

"No, I don't think we can hang about all that time," decided Gimlet. "Besides, Lord Rinborne might be back by then, and need his yacht. We'll get off as soon as we can."

"That suits me," confirmed Tony. "But if we happen to strike the monsoon at its worst you'll know what rain means in Siam."

"Let's leave it at that, then," concluded Gimlet. "I'll start straight away and get things fixed up. Provided your chart is correct I don't think we should have much difficulty in lifting Kashan's wealth. You'll have to amuse yourselves as best you can until I get back, but keep away from the hotel in case Tuanik is still hanging about."

And so it was left. Gimlet departed that same evening and was away for ten days. The only communication that came from him was a number of passport forms that had to be completed, signed, and returned with portrait photographs of each member of the party. These were obtained in Inverness, the trip occupying a day. Copper got his hair cut. For the rest, Cub spent most of his time fishing, with a fair amount of success. Copper, who had not enough patience for this particular sport—indeed, he made no secret of the fact that he thought it was a mug's game—spent most of his time with Tony, playing with the several weapons in the gun room. He shot off a good many cartridges—keeping his hand in, as he said—and presently boasted that with a little more practice Tony would pass as a first-class shot. Nothing was seen or heard of Tuanik. As a result of discreet inquiries Cub learned that he had not been back to the hotel.

Then Gimlet returned and put an end to these pleasant pursuits. All he said was, he had got everything fixed up and they were leaving for the south by the night train.

Two days later the party boarded the steam yacht *Sally* in Chichester harbour. Conspicuous on deck, lashed by the wheels, was a khaki-painted jeep, with a canvas hood, that had obviously seen better days. A few hours later the *Sally* slipped quietly away on the tide.

Thus it came about that after an uneventful but not uninteresting voyage of five weeks, a typical tropical morning found the *Sally* nosing her way through the picturesque craft that frequent the Menan River, on both banks of which, twenty miles from the mouth, lies Bangkok, largest city of Farthest India and Capital of Siam. A pilot came on board and took the yacht to a mooring buoy close enough to the shore for Cub and Tony, who were leaning over the rail together, to see the salient features of the famous

Oriental port. Tony, to whom the picture was commonplace, pointed out the commercial area, the Chinese quarter and the native Siamese town, dominated by the Royal Palace containing the famous Emerald Buddha. Rather wistfully, he indicated the direction of the bungalow in which he had been born; but he said he had no particular wish to see it again.

He pointed out the people of many nationalities moving about in the wharf; the Siamese, lighter in colour than the Malays; Chinese in blue overalls and enormous hats; better-class Siamese in snow white shirts and Buddhist priests with shaven heads wearing only sandals and the yellow robes of their office; an occasional Siamese soldier, in his brown uniform. With laughter and a beating of gongs a Buddhist funeral was moving along a road shadowed by enormous Rain-trees, and bounded by canals crossed by tiny wooden bridges acting as front doorsteps leading to houses with quaint, pagoda-like roofs.

Presently, for a change of scene, Cub crossed the deck to the opposite rail to look at the shipping. Tony went with him. Seeming to fill the picture as it steamed slowly past was a liner flying the Red Ensign. The rail of her promenade deck was lined with passengers and curious tourists, mostly European. One face with a dark skin was conspicuous. Cub noticed it, at first without any particular interest. Then, catching his breath, he looked again, hardly able to believe his eyes, although, as he realised a moment later, there was nothing remarkable in what he saw. Catching Tony by the arm he dragged him back; but it was too late; the man had seen him. That was evident from the way he called the attention of the two men next to him. The dark man was Tuanik. His companions were Smith and Gray.

Tuanik must have perceived that he had been recognised for he grimaced and made a strange gesture with his right hand.

“What does he mean by that?” asked Cub.

“That,” answered Tony, in a thin voice, “is a Siamese signal for a knife thrust. He means—that’s what he’s going to do to us.”

“What you mean is, that’s what he’d *like* to do to us,” returned Cub evenly.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE LITTLE LOTUS FLOWER

CUB stared after the now receding vessel. "What rotten luck they saw us," he muttered in a vexed voice. "We walked across the deck just at the wrong moment—but how were we to know they were on that ship? They must have come straight out from England." He laughed shortly. "But for Gimlet getting this yacht we might have come out on the same ship. That *would* have been amusing. Well, the damage is done and there's nothing we can do about it—except that I'd better go and break the news to Gimlet."

As it happened, at this moment, Gimlet and Copper, who had been speaking with the captain, joined them. Cub told them what had happened.

"Pity about that," murmured Gimlet. "Still, as you say, you weren't to know. It was just one of those things. There is this about it, if they've seen you, you've also seen them, so the thing cuts both ways." He thought for a moment. "This means a change of plan," he went on. "I dislike the idea of being intimidated by those rascals, but as a matter of simple precautions we shall have to watch our steps, or goodness knows what mischief they may cause. I'm not thinking so much of any personal violence they might try as the inconvenience we should probably suffer if they enlisted the services of friends they may have in government departments. They talk here a lot about democracy, but at the moment they're as near being a totalitarian state as makes no difference; which means that their politics are pretty corrupt. I had intended to go ashore at the proper place and in the usual way, and then put up at one of the best hotels. That's out of the question now. Tuanik would soon find out where we were, and after that every move we made would be watched. Our only hope of avoiding that is to move fast, before Tuanik can get ashore and make his arrangements. If we *can* give that bunch of crooks the slip so much the better. It should still take them a little time to get ashore. We'll try to beat them to it. Just a minute while I have a word with the skipper about getting the jeep ashore right away. I'll be back." He strode off.

He was away only about five minutes. "I've got that fixed," he announced. "The skipper's getting one of these native rafts to put the jeep on the wharf. It will take a minute or two. Incidentally, I had to give him a rough idea of what's happening, so that he can warn the watch to keep a look-out for us in case we come back in a hurry—as we may. I've also told him to keep steam up in case we have to leave at a moment's notice."

Tony put in a word. “I’ve been thinking,” he said. “Tuanik must still think he’s got the right chart or why did he come back here?”

“Yes, that’s a point,” admitted Gimlet. “I suppose it was a safe assumption, though, that sooner or later you’d come here to try to get the treasure. When you suddenly disappeared from Scotland he may have thought you’d already started. I should say it’s more likely that he’s realised that the chart he’s got is useless. Failing to find you in Scotland he dashed back here so that he would be on the spot to intercept you if you did come out. Anyway, by an extraordinary bit of good luck for him he knows you’re here, now. But we’ve still got a trump card, one that we must keep out of sight until the time comes to show it. He doesn’t know you’ve been reinforced, so to speak. He knows nothing about me, or Copper. He’s never seen us, and knows nothing of our association. He probably imagines that he’s only got you two kids to deal with, and that’s where he may slip up. We must let him continue to think that. What I mean is, we must avoid being seen together. By the way, Tony, I suppose you know this place pretty well?”

“Very well indeed. I know the whole district, because my father often took me with him in his car when he went out to see patients.”

“Good. Do you happen to know of a quiet little hotel somewhere in the country, not too far away, where we can put up for the time being? We must keep out of the city to avoid being seen, and to stay on the yacht would mean that Tuanik, even if he didn’t actually keep watch himself, would make arrangements to have us watched. He would be warned of every move we made. Once he gets ashore he’ll be after you, there’s no doubt of that.” Gimlet was still watching the liner, around which several small boats were now crowding, offering for sale to the tourists local produce and souvenirs. “I hope he doesn’t get off in one of those boats,” he concluded.

“He might send a message ashore by one of the boatmen,” suggested Cub.

“Yes, so he might,” agreed Gimlet. He turned back to Tony. “Do you know of a place that would suit us? We’ve got to stay somewhere.”

“Yes, I think I know the very establishment,” answered Tony. “It has the advantage of being on the way to Tankoy. It’s about twenty miles from here—a house standing by itself called The Little Lotus Flower. It’s really a tea room, but one can stay there. It’s run by a Chinese named Mr. Loo. I’ve stopped there for tea several times with my father.”

“Good enough,” answered Gimlet. “Now, this is the plan. As soon as the jeep is ashore you’ll go after it. I’ve put in everything we’re likely to want—

tools, ropes, a chopper, crowbar, torches, sacks and mosquito repellant. From what I've heard the mosquitoes here are pretty bad."

"They're awful," Tony told him.

"All right. We can't clutter ourselves up with too much personal luggage. Small kit in a haversack will be as much as we can manage."

"We'd better take mackintoshes," suggested Tony. "I don't like the look of that cloud peeping over the hills."

"Take one if you like. Cub, you'd better put a gun in your pocket—if it isn't already there. I see the jeep's ashore. Get off as soon as you can. I shall follow with Copper in a hired car. We may be a little while because I shall have to slip into the city to change some money. We shall need cash. It doesn't matter about us being seen. No one knows us and Tuanik doesn't know we're with you. We'll join you as soon as we can. Which is the road, Tony? Shall we have any difficulty in finding it?"

"No, you can't mistake it. It's the main road north, to Nakon. After about twenty miles there's a sharp bend to the left. You'll see The Little Lotus Flower standing back on the left hand side."

"Okay. We'll meet there. What we do after that will depend on how things go. That's enough to go on with."

"Do we recognise you when you get to The Little Lotus Flower?" asked Cub.

"We might as well go on pretending to be strangers," decided Gimlet. "We can always exchange notes when no one is about."

"And what about the chart? It's still in the back of my watch."

"I think you'd better give it to me," requested Gimlet. "It will be safer with me than with you if only because these crooks don't know me. There's still a chance that they may try to grab you and go through your pockets."

"I'm glad to be rid of the responsibility," declared Cub, taking the document from the back of his watch and passing it to Gimlet. "By the way," he added, "just as Tuanik doesn't know you, you wouldn't recognise him if you saw him. He isn't easy to describe, but you can't make any mistake about Smith, who's always with him. He's got a pushed-in nose, and a white scar on his face shaped like a boomerang."

"I'll remember it," said Gimlet. "One thing. When Tuanik gets tired of watching the yacht without seeing anything of you he'll start looking elsewhere. First of all he'll probably try the hotels. What I'm most afraid of though, is this: it wasn't possible to get the jeep ashore without it being seen by the usual loafers on the waterfront. If Tuanik comes along making

inquiries he may learn about it and put two and two together; so watch your step. However, we shan't be far away if there is any trouble. You'd better get along now."

"We're on our way," answered Cub. "Come on, Tony, let's get our small kit." He walked briskly to the companion way.

Five minutes later, with their haversacks slung, Cub and Tony stepped from the yacht's dinghy to the wooden wharf on which the jeep had been unloaded. Two members of the crew were protecting it from the too-close curiosity of the usual idlers—mostly natives—who invariably appear on such occasions. Cub took the wheel and drove off. "You tell me the way, Tony," he requested. "Keep out of the town as far as you can. I don't want to start a rumpus by breaking the local traffic regulations."

"There's no need to go into the city at all," Tony told him. "Take the next turning to the left and we can bypass it."

Cub drove on under Tony's guidance, seeing little but the road, on which he concentrated his attention, for, as he had remarked, he was anxious to avoid making himself conspicuous by becoming involved in any sort of mishap. It needed all his attention, too, to keep clear of the casual pedestrians who wandered all over the road. Nobody appeared to take any notice of the vehicle, probably because, as Tony pointed out, jeeps captured by the Japanese were common enough in Siam during the war. Cub was soon through the outskirts of the town however, and presently they were travelling through flat, open country between endless fields of pale green 'paddy', which Tony said was young rice. The fields were small, separated by ridges of raised earth, with occasional nursery beds of young plants. This monotonous landscape lasted for some miles before giving way to thickly-wooded country, often sheer jungle.

"Is anybody following us?" asked Cub once.

Tony had a good look. "I don't think so," he answered. "I can't see anybody."

Cub drove on, more comfortable now that he was on an open road clear of the town. He did not find the scenery, such as could be observed, particularly interesting; he noted that it was much the same as that of Indo-China, farther east, which he had occasion to visit on a special mission with Gimlet during the war.[4] There were the same little houses with pagoda-like roofs, the same luxuriant vegetation, and the same sort of people.

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[4] See *Comrades in Arms*.

"We're almost there," announced Tony at last. "If my memory is right the Lotus Flower is just round the next corner."

Cub glanced at his watch. "Three o'clock," he observed. "And this is the road to Tankoy?"

"That's right. It must be about sixty miles farther on."

"Hm. That's no great distance," remarked Cub. "If Gimlet came along pretty soon I don't see why we couldn't push right on and get the job finished. We could be back on the yacht before midnight and be on our way home by morning—before Tuanik could really get cracking."

"That would be fine," declared Tony, as Cub brought the car to a stop outside a long, low, attractive bungalow of Oriental design, with a verandah running the whole length of its front aspect. A neatly kept garden ablaze with exotic flowers, mostly gardenias and hibiscus, gave the place an atmosphere of well-being.

Tony got out. "I'll just slip in to make sure that it's okay for us to stay here."

"Good enough," agreed Cub, getting out and following him slowly.

(See p. 116)

"*I'll just slip in to make sure.*"

Before Tony reached the door there appeared on the threshold an old, dignified Chinaman, dressed in the fashion of his country, hands tucked into voluminous sleeves. He greeted Tony with a smile of recognition, so Cub knew this must be Mr. Loo, the proprietor. In this he was not mistaken, and after an exchange of remarks in what Cub took to be Siamese, Tony called

him forward and introduced him. “Mr. Loo says that the house and everything in it is ours—which means that we can stay here,” he announced. “He says it’s going to rain pretty soon so we’d better put the jeep in that *atap* shelter.” He pointed to an open shed built of bamboo, roofed with the big fronds of Nipah palm.

Cub put the car under cover and returned to find that Tony had made himself comfortable in one of the several long cane chairs that were set at intervals along the verandah.

“We might as well sit here,” suggested Tony. “How about some tea while we’re waiting—real tea?”

“Sounds good to me,” agreed Cub. “I could do with a drink. By gosh, it’s hot! This sticky sultry heat gets me down.”

Tony smiled. “You soon get used to it when you’ve been here a little while,” he averred.

Presently the tea was brought in tiny, egg-shell thin cups. Mr. Loo then withdrew, leaving them alone.

Cub sipped his tea with relish. “That’s better,” he declared. “I wonder how long the others are going to be,” he went on, and then glanced round as a bell jangled somewhere inside the building. “Is this place on the telephone?” he asked, mildly surprised.

“Oh yes,” answered Tony. “We’re on a main road. Siam is like that. Either it’s civilised, or else, once you’re off the main road, it’s the same as it always has been—sheer jungle, jungle and swamp. Wait till you try to get through it.”

Cub s eyebrows went up. “Shall we have to go through it?”

“I expect so. Once we leave the main road the track to the *kampong* will be pretty bad, I expect. But from there to the old temple, if the jungle track happens to be overgrown, as it may be, it won’t be funny, I assure you. These jungle tracks are mostly made by buffaloes, and if they happen to be wild ones, they’re not funny, either, particularly if you strike them in an ugly mood.”

“Are they often in an ugly mood?” queried Cub, with some concern.

“They usually are if a tiger has been worrying them.”

“Tiger! Are there tigers here?”

“Plenty.”

“That’s dandy,” muttered Cub. “It begins to look as if, by the time we’ve got this treasure, we shall have earned it.”

Further conversation on this subject was prevented by the return of Mr. Loo, who spoke to Tony at some length in Siamese. When he had finished Tony turned a puzzled face to Cub. “Mr. Loo says that was the police on the telephone.”

“So what?”

“They wanted to know if two young men in a jeep had come here.”

“The deuce they did! What did he say?”

“He said yes, naturally.”

Cub frowned. “But why do the police want *us*?”

Tony shrugged. “Apparently they didn’t say. They just wanted to know if anything had been seen of us. Mr. Loo said we were staying here.”

Cub moved uncomfortably. “I don’t like the sound of that. Why should they be interested in us? I didn’t knock anybody down, did I?”

“I didn’t notice it.”

“Well, there must be something wrong,” opined Cub seriously. “I wish Gimlet would hurry up. If there’s going to be trouble I should feel happier if he was around.”

Half an hour passed, and Cub was just about to suggest that they went in to have something to eat, when the sound of a car, travelling fast, became audible. “Thank goodness! Here they are!” he exclaimed, in a tone of relief, for he assumed, naturally enough, that this was the car for which they had been waiting.

When the vehicle swung round the bend into sight it turned out to be a smallish, black-painted van. It came to a skidding stop outside the tea house. Cub took one look at the driver, and the man who sat next to him, and held his breath. Both wore uniforms—police uniforms. Their appearance, following the phone call, left him in no doubt as to whom they had come to see. Not that he was particularly worried, for as far as he knew they had done nothing wrong.

The two policemen got out of the car and walked briskly to the verandah. Said the taller of the two, in fair English: “Soho. We find you.”

“What do you mean—found us?” questioned Cub wonderingly. “We’re not trying to hide.”

The man waved a hand towards the van. “Come,” he ordered.

“Come where?” demanded Cub, in genuine astonishment.

“To Bangkok.”

“But why? What have we done?”

"You smugglers," was the staggering accusation. "You jump off ship. Not go Customs House. No show passport. You bad men. Come." The policeman's manner was brusque, to say the least of it.

Cub looked helplessly down the road hoping to see Gimlet coming. It was empty. He was now seriously alarmed, and in a dilemma of considerable size. What the policeman had said about the way they had come ashore was true enough, and he could not deny it. They had skipped the usual landing formalities, but he was under the impression that Gimlet would take care of that. Obviously, he could not tell the police why he had come ashore in such a hurry. It was unlikely that he would be believed, anyway. To return to Bangkok was outside their arrangements; it would completely upset their plan, which had been designed with the very object of avoiding the city. Yet to refuse to obey the order would most certainly make matters worse. To resist arrest would be a far more serious offence than the original one. On the other hand, to return to Bangkok would leave Gimlet in the air. No doubt Mr. Loo would tell him what had happened, in which case he would have to go all the way back to Bangkok, too. It was all very annoying, but he could see no way out of it. The delay would be infuriating, but even so, his wisest course, he decided, was to obey the order. He told Tony this. "It's a confounded nuisance, but if we get wrong with the police we're liable to see the inside of the local jail," he muttered.

Tony agreed, so telling Mr. Loo, who had been watching these proceedings from the verandah, what had happened, he walked towards the waiting van. He did not leave a personal message for Gimlet because this again was in opposition to their plan, in which it had been arranged that they should behave as strangers. All he could say to Mr. Loo was that they hoped to be back shortly. They would leave their haversacks there. He asked the policeman if he could drive to Bangkok in his own car. The answer was a crisp refusal.

Cub shrugged, and went on to the van.

One of the policemen opened the door at the back. "Inside," he ordered.

Cub advanced, and stooping so as not to bump his head, stepped lightly into the van.

What followed happened so quickly, and came as such a shock, that it was all over before he could put up anything like an effective resistance. At one moment he was stepping into the van; the next, he was inside, flat on his back with a suffocating weight on his chest. The warning cry that rose to his lips was stifled even as it was born by a reeking cloth that smothered his face. Unable to make a sound, and convinced that he was being strangled, he

struggled with the desperation of despair; but in vain. In a matter of seconds his strength and his senses were leaving him; and he knew it. For a moment he had a sickening feeling of slipping, of sliding down a chute, faster and faster, while bells clanged in his ears. The noise died away. A wonderful light illuminated the universe. At first it was white, and seemed to spin; then it was yellow; from yellow it turned to red and from red to purple. It ended in utter darkness.

The period of unconsciousness that followed must have lasted for some time, for when he opened his eyes he was lying on the floor of what appeared to be a rather dirty attic. His first sensation was one of nausea and giddiness. The room spun round him when he attempted to sit up, so he sank back. Then, slowly at first, but finally with a rush, memory returned. He sat up again, and saw Tony, still unconscious, lying beside him. The next thing he saw was Tuanik, sitting in a cheap chair, tilted back, a cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth. As their eyes met Tuanik smiled—the smile of a man who has done a smart piece of work and is elated with success. Leaning against the wall was Smith, picking his teeth with a matchstick.

Seeing that Cub's eyes were open Tuanik brought his chair to even keel and stood up. "Come on," he said. "You've had long enough. I'm waiting to talk to you."

Cub did not answer at once. He wanted time to think to get the situation in right perspective. "I don't know what you're waiting to say, and I don't care," he replied slowly. "Whatever it is you'll be wasting your breath."

Tuanik smiled again, showing his white teeth. "You think so, eh?"

"I know so," said Cub doggedly.

Tuanik's smile faded. "So that's how you feel?"

"That's how I feel."

Tuanik nodded. "I've heard people talk like that before, but it's just ignorance," he said smoothly. "In this part of the world there are men who specialise in the art of making the most obstinate people only too happy to talk. It's a trade that's handed down from father to son. They boast they can make the dead speak. I have one of them waiting outside. Shall I bring him in?"

"You can do what you like."

Tuanik took a step towards the door, but looked back over his shoulder. "You know what I want to know?"

"I've got a good idea."

"And that's your last word?"

“For the time being.”

Tuanik opened the door, called out something, returned to his chair and lit another cigarette.

Presently, with shuffling steps, an old man of indeterminable nationality, clad in the filthiest collection of rags Cub had ever seen, came in, bringing with him what Cub supposed were the tools of his ghastly trade. The most conspicuous object was a small brazier filled with charcoal. Without so much as a glance at his victims the old man knelt down and with his breath coaxed the charcoal, which was already alight, to a dull red glow. His manner was quietly businesslike as if he had done the same thing many times before, and even Tuanik watched with morbid curiosity.

At this juncture Tony suddenly sat up. He looked at Cub, at Tuanik, and at the brazier. “What’s happening?” he asked.

“Where’s the paper your father gave you?” demanded Tuanik. “I’ve been through your pockets and it isn’t there. Where is it?”

“I haven’t got it,” answered Tony.

“What did you do with it?”

“That,” replied Tony, “is for you to find out.”

“And that,” returned Tuanik grimly, “is just what I’m going to do.”

CHAPTER X

COPPER TAKES A TURN

By one of those maddening tricks of chance Gimlet and Copper arrived at The Little Lotus Flower less than a minute too late to prevent the drama that had just been enacted there. As a matter of detail, Copper, who was driving a high-powered Renault car which Gimlet had hired from a garage in Bangkok, almost collided with the black van as he rounded the sharp bend that brought the tea-house into view. He himself was travelling fast because Gimlet had been somewhat longer over his business than he expected, but he was at least on his own side of the highway, whereas the van was not only travelling at dangerous speed, but was swerving, as Copper put it, "All over the perishing road." Mentally cursing all crazy drivers in general, and the driver of the black van in particular—little guessing who was in the vehicle—he brought the car to a standstill outside his destination. The only person in sight was an old Chinaman, who looking distressed, stood staring in front of him from the verandah.

Followed leisurely by Copper, Gimlet got out, looking around for Cub, whom he fully expected to see waiting for him. He saw the jeep standing under the *atap* shelter, but neither of Cub nor Tony was there any sign. Assuming that they were inside he walked on to where the Chinaman stood, and after ascertaining that it was Mr. Loo, asked him in English if he could accommodate two travellers.

The old man seemed to pull himself together with a start, as if he had been deep in thought. "Two more?" he said in a curious voice.

Naturally, this remark only tended to confirm Gimlet's supposition that Cub and Tony were inside, so that it was really only for the sake of making polite conversation that he inquired: "So you already have travellers staying here?"

"So I think, but they go," answered Mr. Loo. He regarded Gimlet suspiciously. "You wanted them also?"

"Want them?" Gimlet's expression made it clear that as far as he was concerned the conversation did not make sense.

"They come in this," said Mr. Loo, pointing to the jeep. "They go in that motor. You meet black motor I tlink?"

"Yes," agreed Gimlet, wondering what was coming next.

"It takes young men away."

"Took them away?" Gimlet still could not make top nor tail of this.

"They say they are police," explained Mr. Loo.

"Who say?"

"Pleople in black car."

By this time Gimlet had an uneasy suspicion that something was amiss. "Do you mean to say that your guests were taken away by the police?" he asked sharply.

Mr. Loo looked vague. "They say they are police. They come. They say my guests must go to Bangkok. They go. One says he soon come back. But when they get to car there is a tling I not understand."

"What happened?" asked Gimlet in a brittle voice.

"They are pulled in car. I see this. I stand here. I see legs kicking. Police get in and go with much speedo. I not know——"

Gimlet did not wait to hear what Mr. Loo did not know. He ran back to the car. All he said to Copper was: "They've got the boys. Get after that black van. Step on it."

Copper, with the corners of his mouth turned down, obeyed the order. "So that's it?" he rasped.

"That's what it looks like," returned Gimlet. "If that van gets to Bangkok first the kids have had it."

"Hang on, sir," said Copper grimly, and settled a little lower in his seat.

Gimlet also settled in his seat. What had happened was clear. He felt sure that the police must be impostors because he had been to the Customs Office to report the arrival of the whole party. Police were in attendance, so had the boys got into trouble of any sort he would almost certainly have heard about it. His papers had not even been questioned. There had been a short delay while some of the passengers had been attended to, and it was due to this that his arrival at The Little Lotus Flower had been delayed.

In the ordinary way Copper did not believe in taking chances on the road, but the present circumstances were not ordinary, and the powerful car devoured the miles in rapid succession. He had every hope of overtaking the van before it reached Bangkok, and so probably he would have done had it not been for an incident which came near to ending not only the journey but his life. This was when an elephant came trotting out of a side road. It was a domestic beast of burden and obviously harmless, for two children were driving it to a piece of waste ground on the other side of the road. Copper was prepared for almost anything, but not for elephants, which he had forgotten were commonly used for transport in Siam—if, in fact, he ever knew it. The trouble was aggravated by the fact that the light, already

fading, was dim under the high forest trees which overhung the road, so that when the great beast appeared—like a house on legs, as Copper afterwards put it—he did not for a moment realise what it was. When he did he had to stand on his brakes to avoid collision. The result was a terrifying skid which ended off the road. One wheel sank nearly to the hub in soft mud, and Copper, incoherent with fury at the delay, was some minutes getting clear; and this was only accomplished by tearing down brushwood and thrusting it under the wheels to give them a grip. “Dogs and chickens all over the road at home is bad enough, but when it comes to elephants careering up and down, blimey, what you want is a tank,” he growled, as he set off again.

(See p. 127)

Copper was prepared for almost anything, but not for elephants.

The result of this hold-up was, they did not catch sight of the vehicle they were pursuing until they were in the outskirts of the city. Even then, of course, they had no means of confirming that the van was the one they were after. But it was, at any rate, a small black van, so they could only hope for the best, and Copper settled down to follow it. This was not easy as the traffic became more and more congested, particularly with rickshaws, as

they crossed the central district. However, he managed to keep it in sight until they were in the narrow squalid streets of a native quarter. Here it suddenly disappeared from view. Realising that it must have taken an insignificant side turning which he had not noticed, Copper turned the car, nearly knocking over a fruit vendor's stall in the process, and soon found what he sought—to his great relief, for by this time darkness was closing in with usual tropical suddenness. In a narrow alley between tall, ramshackle houses, garishly decorated with native signs and symbols, stood the van. It was no longer in motion. The rear door was open revealing an empty interior. Pulling up close behind it it became possible to ascertain that there was no one even in the driving seat. The fake policemen, and their prisoners, had vanished.

"All right. We'll leave the car here," said Gimlet in a businesslike voice as he dismounted. "Come on," he continued. "We've no time to waste. I don't like the look of this place, nor do I like the smell of it. Be ready for trouble."

"Aye, aye, sir," returned Copper, warmly.

Gimlet was now inspecting the building outside which the van had been parked. Like the rest, it was tall, dilapidated, with overhanging eaves; but it had this difference. Up the side of it ran a black, evil-smelling passage. Where it led or what purpose it served was not evident. Anyway, for the moment Gimlet ignored it, but went to the front door, the only aperture in the front of the house. A sign hung over it, but it was in Oriental symbols, which neither he nor Copper could read.

Gimlet tried the door. It remained closed. He put his shoulder against it, but it did not move. Stepping back he regarded the timber of which it was made. "It would need a sledge hammer to break through that," he asserted.

"What about knocking?" suggested Copper.

"And warn everybody inside to be on their guard?" queried Gimlet sarcastically. "That's no use."

At this point two policemen, or two men dressed as policemen, came out of the passage. They hesitated when they saw Gimlet and Copper standing there, and stared hard at them before going on quickly to the van as if they intended driving it away. But at the door they stopped, and looking again at the two white men held a swift conversation. At the conclusion one of them hurried back into the passage.

"He's going to tip them off inside that we're here," said Gimlet in a low voice. "Come on, after him."

They turned into the passage just in time to see the pseudo-policeman disappearing into an unsuspected side door. Copper made a dash for it. The door was slammed in his face, but his foot, out-thrust, held it. For a second or two the man on the other side tried to secure it, but Copper, with a grunt of impatience, put his full weight against it and it began to give. Upon this, with a sharp scuffle the man inside bolted. The door flew open, but nothing could be seen, for beyond the door was utter darkness. From out of the interior of the house drifted a heavy, sickly smell.

Gimlet, who had followed, pushed past Copper. His petrol lighter clicked. The tiny flame revealed a corridor which ended in a flight of narrow winding stairs. At the foot of the staircase, on the left, a door was revealed by a feeble light that crept out from below it. Gimlet strode to it and threw it open, to disclose a long narrow room with bunks on either side like the fo'castle of an old ship. On some of these bunks men were lying or reclining. The atmosphere was suffocating and blurred by smoke. An old Chinaman, who had been squatting by a brazier at the far end, sprang to his feet with a startled cry when he saw the intruders. Then he came forward, bowing.

Gimlet ignored him. "We're in an opium den," he told Copper. "They're not here—let's try the stairs." He went out, closing the door behind him. At the foot of the stairs he hesitated, and as he stood there, with Copper beside him, from somewhere overhead came a sound of active movement. Gimlet waited no longer. Followed by Copper he dashed up the stairs.

"Watch you don't get lost in this stinkin' rabbit warren, sir," muttered Copper.

"You guard the rear," returned Gimlet, in a brittle voice.

The stairs ended in a corridor similar to the one below, except that, on a small bamboo table at the far end, a filthy little oil lamp added the reek of paraffin to the vitiated air. The light it gave was negligible, but it did at least turn absolute darkness to a sullen yellow gloom. Across this a human figure flitted like a shadow, apparently from one room to another. At yet another door a dark face showed for a moment. A white-sleeved arm appeared.

"Look out!" snapped Gimlet, and ducked.

There was a vicious thud as something struck the wall by his side, and remained in it, quivering. The face disappeared. Gimlet reached out to the wall and with a quick jerk tore out the knife that had buried its point in the flimsy partition. Then, with an urgent scuffling, more figures flitted across the corridor at the far end. Bending low and keeping close against the wall,

Gimlet strode towards them, but stopped again as the figures disappeared up what turned out to be another flight of stairs.

"If you go up them stairs you'll be askin' for it," said Copper. "What we want is a grenade or two, to winkle this place out properly."

Gimlet did not answer. For a moment he stood listening, undecided. Then he shouted: "Cub! Cub, where are you!"

A choking cry, quickly smothered, came from somewhere near at hand. Spinning round Gimlet took a swift step towards a door from behind which the sound had seemed to come. He turned the handle. The door was locked. Side-stepping, to Copper he said: "Open this door."

Copper raised his right foot. The leg straightened with a jerk. The door flew open with a splintering crash. Yellow light flooded out, and through it Gimlet saw all he needed to see. Cub and Tony were there, tied in two chairs that had been placed side by side. Each had a dirty rag tied round his mouth. They were not alone. With them was an old man, although a small door left ajar behind him suggested that there had been others. The man who remained, a very dirty native, was in front of Cub, doing something to a brazier of glowing charcoal that stood on the floor. Moving quickly he appeared to be trying either to pick it up or to put it out.

Copper did not trouble to ascertain which. Two strides took him to the stooping figure. His foot shot out. There was a yell of fear and pain as it caught the native square on that part of his anatomy on which it is customary to sit and sent him and his charcoal into a heap in the corner. He was not seriously hurt, however, for making uncouth noises he sprang to his feet and scrambled through the small doorway like a wounded rat bolting into its hole. By this time Gimlet had cut free Cub and Tony, who lost no time in unwinding the rags from their mouths.

Cub pointed to the door through which the old native had disappeared. "That's the way they went—Tuanik and Smith," he panted.

Copper strode towards it, but Gimlet ordered him back. "Never mind them," he said curtly. "Let's get out of this stinking hole—I shall never feel clean again." He turned to Cub and Tony. "Are you all right—I mean, can you walk?"

They assured them that there was nothing wrong with them.

"Come on, then," commanded Gimlet. "Copper, you watch the rear."

The end of the corridor was reached without trouble but it was then apparent from swift, furtive movements below, that steps were being taken to cut off their retreat. From the darkness at the bottom of the stairs came whisperings and stealthy footsteps.

Gimlet halted. “Somebody’s going to get hurt if we go down there,” he whispered. “Stand fast.” He opened a door on his left. The room was in darkness, but a window revealed itself as a square of blue moonlight. Four quick paces took him to it. He opened it and looked down. Ten feet below lay the river—or, to be more accurate, its muddy bed, exposed by the receding tide. Little of this could be seen, however, for every inch of space was occupied by native craft of some sort, mostly junks, lying choc-a-bloc, their keels in the mud. One junk was immediately below the window. Turning, he called the others. “There’s no point in starting a rough house if it can be avoided,” he told them in a low voice. “It would mean trouble with the authorities. We’ll go this way. Hold the door, Copper, in case they come up. Down you go, Cub—Tony; make it snappy. They’ll soon guess what we’re doing.”

Cub climbed through the window, hung for a moment at full length, and then dropped on the junk’s deck. “Okay!” he called. Tony followed. Then came Copper with a heavy thud. Gimlet joined the party. They were only just in time, for as Gimlet’s feet struck the deck a dark face appeared at the window of the room they had just vacated. There was a shrill cry of warning.

Copper picked up a loose block of wood and threw it. The face disappeared.

“All right, no fooling,” said Gimlet tersely. “Come on.”

That began a curious procession with Gimlet leading the way. He ran the length of the junk on which they had dropped, jumped on to the next, and so continued down the waterside, the others close behind in a glorified game of follow-my-leader. Sometimes one of the vessels they boarded were occupied by a native crew, or by an entire family, including women and children. What they thought of the affair is not known, for they did not say. They did not protest. They simply stood and stared in dumb amazement, like startled animals.

At length Gimlet stopped at a place where a ramshackle gangway connected a junk with a rotting wharf. He looked back for the first time, and whistled softly, pointing.

Turning, Cub saw smoke pouring from the windows of the house they had just left. “I’d say that was the charcoal Copper knocked all over the floor,” he surmised.

“Best thing that could ’appen,” remarked Copper. “A nice fire would do this place a bit of good. It needs a clean-up.”

“Let’s keep going,” said Gimlet. “There are too many holes and corners in this district for my liking. We might still have a thin time if Tuanik gets a gang cracking after us.”

Nothing of the sort happened however, and once in the city they felt reasonably safe. Gimlet went to the garage where he had hired the car and described as well as he could the place where he had left it. The garage proprietor, a Siamese, gave him a queer, knowing look, but made no comment. He agreed to let Gimlet have another car, chauffer-driven, to take the party to The Little Lotus Flower. As Gimlet told the others, they had the jeep, so once there they were all right for transport.

On the way back Cub gave Gimlet, with whom he sat, a detailed account of the trap into which they had stepped, and what had transpired in the Bangkok opium den, which, apparently, was used by Tuanik when it suited his purpose.

“You were just about in time,” he concluded. “When I realised what had happened I thought we’d had it. I’ll be more careful in future.”

“I shan’t let you out of my sight again,” stated Gimlet. “That fake policeman trick was pretty smart, and it worked. Had Tuanik known we were in the offing no doubt he would have been more careful not to let Mr. Loo see anything. That’s where his plan came unstuck. Loo told me what had happened. Tuanik must be getting desperate to do a thing like that. I suppose it wasn’t a difficult matter for him to locate you. All he had to do was ring up every hotel until he struck the right one. He’d probably start in this direction, too, having a pretty good idea of the district you were making for. I mean, he must know the treasure is no great distance from the mansion where the man who owned it used to live. He knows, now, of course, that he has more people to deal with than he supposed.” Gimlet smiled. “He must wonder who I am, and where I suddenly appeared from. Well, it’ll give them something to think about.”

“Are you going to spend the night at The Lotus Flower, now he knows that’s where we’ve parked ourselves?”

“I’ll think about that,” answered Gimlet. “We could all do with a night’s rest—you and Tony particularly; but Tuanik will soon be on the job again, and if we stay, he’ll watch every move we make. I can’t help thinking that there must be a lot of money in this treasure, to make Tuanik so keen. But as far as the immediate future is concerned, our best plan, and probably the easiest in the long run, would be for us to grab some food from Mr. Loo and push on. We must give Tuanik the slip. It looks as if to do that we shall have to spend the night in the jungle—not that that should worry us unduly. But

here we are," concluded Gimlet, as the driver brought the car to a stop in the darkness outside the tea-house.

CHAPTER XI

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

WHAT MR. LOO thought of the return of his four guests together is not known, for he made no comment. He asked no questions, although he must have been curious. His expression of Oriental imperturbability did not change. When Tony, at Gimlet's request, asked if they could have something to eat, he bowed and made a remark to the effect that his house was honoured. They all sat together, for, as Gimlet pointed out, there was no longer any need to pretend to be two separate parties.

Gimlet said little during the meal, which was soon served. Tony was able to tell the others what they were eating, and smiled at the expression on Copper's face when he learned that the dish he so highly approved was shark's fin and bamboo shoots. Rice was served with everything, and tea in tiny, handleless cups, without milk or sugar. "Well, let them 'ave it this way as likes it, but give me a mug holdin' about a pint, every time," announced Copper in a resigned voice, regarding with disdain the minute cup as he picked it up gingerly in his out-size fingers and thumb.

"That reminds me," put in Gimlet, speaking to Tony. "You might ask Mr. Loo for a few uncooked grains of rice. We shall have to do some measuring."

Tony obliged.

"We'd better not be too long over this," went on Gimlet. "We've got to get away before Tuanik can think of some new devilment. That he will, you may be quite sure. I imagine his first step, after he's got things sorted out in Bangkok, will be to reconnoitre this place to see if we're still here. He'll guess that now we're ashore we'll stay ashore, so I doubt if he'll waste time watching the yacht. One thing is pretty clear. This business isn't going to be as simple as I imagined. Even if we find what we are looking for we shall still have to get it back to the yacht, and we can reckon that Tuanik will do anything to prevent that."

"What I'm afraid of is, he may get the government to take a hand," remarked Tony. "He said that the government was interested, and that might well be true. Tuanik would have no difficulty in getting official help if there was big money to be made."

"He may do that, but only if all else fails, I fancy," answered Gimlet thoughtfully. "It would mean sharing the treasure. While there's a hope that he can get the lot for himself he'll play his own hand. We shall see. Meanwhile, my scheme is to get within striking distance of this temple and

find a place to lie low until it gets light enough for us to see what we're doing. Jungle country is bad enough in daylight. In the dark it's impossible. By gad! This sticky heat is hard to take," he concluded, mopping his face with his handkerchief.

"It's always like this just before the rains break," said Tony, casually.

Nobody paid much attention to the remark, but they were to remember it before the night was out.

As soon as the meal was finished Gimlet got up and handed Tony some money. "You go and settle up with Mr. Loo," he requested. "At the same time you might tell him that should anyone come here asking questions about us we'd be obliged if he would know nothing. He can say we've been here and gone, he doesn't know where—which will be true."

"All right," agreed Tony.

Gimlet moved towards the door. "I'll have a look round and get the jeep out."

A few minutes later, after a cautious reconnaissance which revealed no sign of the enemy, the jeep set off on the next stage of its journey. Copper was at the wheel, with Tony, who was to act as guide, sitting next to him. Gimlet sat behind with Cub.

They all knew, for the matter had been discussed, that they had a fair journey in front of them—something in the order of sixty miles, Tony judged, to the track that led to the *kampong* of Tankoy. But the jeep could be relied on to eat up the distance, even in the dark, in a couple of hours. Somewhere along the track, at the first convenient place, a halt would be made until daybreak. This was the intention. It would give them a chance to rest. In the event, however, it did not work out quite like that.

For the main part of the journey all went well. The night was dark, hot, but clear. There was little traffic, and shortly after ten o'clock, with the jeep going dead slow in order not to overshoot, the first objective was reached. This was the rough track that existed only to serve the native *kampong* of Tankoy. The state of this track turned out to be a good deal worse than Tony expected. He admitted that his memory of the place might be at fault, but that was understandable. He had only been there once or twice before, when his father had gone to call on Kashan, and that was a long time ago. Apparently nothing had been done to the track during the war, when the Japanese were in occupation, or since. Copper was forced to drive slowly and carefully to avoid deep ruts and potholes filled with stagnant water. At intervals he gave his opinion of Siamese roads.

Tony reminded him that they were in a country which, outside the developed areas, was still as savage as ever it had been. The dense jungle on either side supported this statement, and further evidence was soon forthcoming.

Copper was driving quite slowly, picking his way—with his headlights on, of course—when he raised himself a little in his seat for a better view of what he took to be a branch lying across the road. "Slip out, Tony, and pull that thing out of the way," he requested; then he changed his mind. "No, it's all right; I reckon she'll take it," he decided, and put his foot on the accelerator. There was a jar as the front wheels bumped against the obstruction. The next instant the jeep nearly went over as something struck it with tremendous force. Cub ducked instinctively as an object like a great black hosepipe swished past his head, and then had to grab the side of the car to save himself from going overboard as it recovered from a wild swerve. Behind it, something was thrashing and lashing in the mud.

Copper's voice, hoarse with shock, cried out: "Strewth! What was that?"

"I think it must have been a python," answered Tony. "Drive on."

Copper needed no second invitation. Ruts or no ruts, he sent the jeep bouncing forward, to the no small discomfort of his passengers.

"The pythons grow pretty big here," offered Tony calmly. "I once saw one twenty-four feet long."

"Cripes! What did yer do?" asked Copper in an awestricken voice.

"It was dead," explained Tony.

"Lucky for you," observed Copper. "Twenty-four feet of worm in one piece'd be no joke—my oath, it wouldn't."

"You watch what you're doing," came Gimlet's voice curtly from behind.

"Aye-aye, sir."

The jeep bumped and lurched on its dismal way.

Five minutes later Copper stood on his brakes as from somewhere near at hand came a shrill blast as from a trumpet. He stared saucer-eyed at Tony. "What in thunder's that?" he demanded.

Before Tony could speak the question was answered for him. With a crashing and rending of timber several great objects appeared in the headlights. They crossed the road swiftly, and there was more crashing as they disappeared.

"It's all right—they were only elephants," explained Tony.

"Wild 'uns?"

"Of course."

Copper drew a deep breath. "What d'yer mean—*only* elephants?" he demanded suspiciously. "What else 'ave you got in this perishin' Whipsnade?"

"Get on and don't talk so much," ordered Gimlet.

"Aye-aye, sir." The jeep bumped on, with Copper keeping a furtive eye on the black forest on either side.

After a little while Tony said: "We ought to be getting close to Kashan's estate. It's along here somewhere on the left. The house, to the best of my recollection, stands on a bit of a hill. There's a drive cut through the jungle leading up to it. There used to be iron gates, but they may not be here now. The drive might be a good place to park the jeep off the road. In fact, it might be the only place this side of the *kampong*."

"We'll have a look at it, if we can find it," answered Gimlet from the rear.

Copper slowed down to crawling pace, still eyeing the jungle on either side with dour suspicion. Nothing could be seen however, except the ghostly glow of innumerable fireflies.

"Here we are," said Tony suddenly. "This is the place. The gates have gone, but the pillars on which they used to hang are still there." He pointed to a narrow opening in the jungle, overhung with festoons of lianas. Moss-grown stone pillars, one leaning at an angle, marked the entrance.

"Drive in, Copper. We'll have a look round, anyway," requested Gimlet.

Copper turned into the opening, and in low gear steered the jeep up a slight incline. It was at once evident that the drive had not been used for a long time, for it was deep in moss and weeds, while from overhead the lianas hung in a thousand loops, at times so low that the passengers had to fend them off with their hands. After perhaps a hundred yards of this the jungle suddenly gave way to an open area, from the centre of which, stark against the sky, rose the broken, roofless walls, of what had once been a house of some size.

Copper brought the car to a stop, cut his engine and jammed on the brake. "What's all this?" he inquired.

"This used to be a lovely house," replied Tony heavily. "It was Kashan's country home, and he was a very rich man. What a shame! Somebody has burnt the place down, or blown it up—the Japs I suppose. Or, of course," he added as a thought struck him, "the house might have been torn down by Tuanik and his friends in their search for the treasure."

By this time Gimlet had stepped down and was looking about him. “How far are we from Tankoy, Tony?” he asked.

“I should think about a mile, as near as I can remember.”

“Then we might as well park here,” decided Gimlet. “I don’t think we shall find anything better.” Turning to Copper he went on: “Turn the car round, and put something under the wheels to prevent her from sliding.”

“Aye-aye, sir,” acknowledged Copper.

The others got out, and while Copper was turning the car, stood gazing at the melancholy wreck of what had once been a noble mansion. In what Tony said had once been the wonderful gardens, shrubs were still in flower, but were fast being smothered by bamboos and tall lalang grass. From the all-conquering jungle came the usual jungle sounds—the croak of bullfrogs, the screech of cicadas, and the chirping of myriads of insects. The mosquitoes were already making their presence felt. Copper having turned the jeep, switched off his lights and joined them.

“I think we’d better sit in the car,” advised Gimlet. “I expect the ground will be crawling with leeches. We’d better get out that insect repellant, too; it looks as if we shall need it—but that was only to be expected. I put in a couple of powerful electric lamps. I’ll get them at the same time so that we can see what we’re doing.”

He was groping in the luggage compartment when it started to rain. It did not begin slowly, as is usual in temperate zones. It was as if all the taps of the universe had been turned on together so that the water came down in long straight bars. There was a scramble to get back under the canvas hood of the jeep, but even so the respite was of brief duration. No material could withstand such a deluge and everyone was soon wet through. Cub, crouching with his collar turned up, found himself sitting in a puddle with his feet in a pool of water.

“What a climate,” breathed Copper. “Strike Old Riley, what a climate.”

“Nice weather for ducks,” observed Cub tritely, trying to remain cheerful.

“Luvly, I should say—but I ain’t a duck,” growled Copper.

After about half an hour the rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun. The jungle insects resumed their chirping; the mosquitoes rose in swarms and the fireflies resumed their ghostly waltzing among the trees.

“That’s a bit better any old how,” observed Copper, wringing out his cap.

“It’ll soon start again I’m afraid,” said Tony. “That was just a preliminary shower.”

“A shower, eh?” Copper looked at Cub. “Did you hear that, chum?” he inquired with a biting sarcasm. “That was just a little shower. Strike me pink! What do yer do ’ere when it starts ter rain, that’s what I want ter know?”

“When it *really* rains you don’t do anything—you can’t,” Tony informed him.

“And how long does that last?” asked Copper seriously.

“Weeks—sometimes for months.”

“Well, blow me down! And people still go on living in this place?” Copper’s voice was pitched high with incredulity.

“They do.”

“Then they must be nuts, that’s all I’ve got ter say about it,” asserted Copper. “They can ’ave it. Give me good old smoky Wapping, on a Saturday night with the lights aflarin’ and the smell o’ fried fish——”

“Stop babbling,” requested Gimlet sharply. “If it’s going to rain we’d better go and examine those ruins to see if there’s anywhere with better cover than we’ve got here.”

“What about serpents?” inquired Copper. “What ’appens if we step on one?”

“You’re safe from a python as long as it can’t get its tail round a tree to get a grip on you,” explained Tony.

“Well, now ain’t that jest luvly?” sneered Copper. “What do I do? Pull up the trees as I go along and throw ’em on one side, is that the idea?”

“I wouldn’t advise you to touch the trees,” returned Tony seriously. “They’re full of red ants, and they bite pretty hard.”

Copper sighed. “What a country,” he breathed. “S’welp me, what a country.”

Gimlet was walking on towards the ruins, showing the way with one of the powerful lamps he had taken from the car, although the beam was at once partly obscured by thousand of moths and other insects that poured into it from all sides. Reaching the nearest wall he stopped, and turning the beam slowly, explored the scene. “What about that?” he queried allowing the light to rest on what had once been an outbuilding. It stood a little apart from the rest and seemed to have escaped serious damage. There was an arched doorway, but no door.

“Let’s go and look at it,” suggested Cub. “The place has at least got a roof.”

They turned their steps towards it, Gimlet revealing with his light the surrounding scene of devastation, now mostly overgrown with vegetation, showing that the vandalism had occurred some years before. Nearing the little outbuilding, which was built like a miniature pagoda, Gimlet turned the beam of his lamp into the doorway. This, apparently startled an occupant. The almost naked figure of a man appeared, stood poised for a moment, and then, with an animal-like scream of fear bounded away into some adjacent undergrowth.

Everyone had, of course, pulled up in his tracks the moment the apparition appeared, and not a little shaken, remained motionless until it disappeared from sight.

"What was that?" gasped Copper. He produced an automatic from his hip pocket with surprising speed and jerking a cartridge into the breech held it ready for instant use.

"It was a man—of sorts," answered Gimlet.

"Did you see his face?" asked Cub, in a tense voice.

"All I could see was teeth," returned Copper.

"That's what I mean. What a horror!"

"He must have been disfigured by some disease—that's what it looked like to me," put in Gimlet. "I don't think we'll go in there. Judging from what came out of it the inside will be rather worse than a pigsty." He turned away towards the main building, and after stumbling about for some time, followed by the others, he indicated a wall that had so fallen upon another as to form a rough shelter. Near this they sat down on fallen masonry to await the next downpour, should one occur. Copper was for lighting a fire to dry their clothes, but Gimlet vetoed the idea as impracticable. By removing their clothes, he asserted, they would only expose larger areas of their persons to the voracious mosquitoes. Their clothes were too wet to be so easily dried, anyway, and he gave it as his experience that trying to keep mosquitoes at bay by making a lot of smoke was merely to exchange one discomfort for another. He also pointed out that the light of a fire would give away their position to anyone who happened to be about—the native who had bolted at their approach, for instance, who would be able to take pot shots at them with impunity, from any weapon he happened to possess.

No one disputed this, so they all sat silent until the moon rose and lighted the darkness somewhat. They could not actually see it because it was behind a cloud layer, but through this a wan light filtered.

The next meteorological development was a flash of lightning that for a split second illuminated the strange scene. It was followed by a long rumble

of thunder.

"Here it comes, I'm afraid," murmured Tony.

"What do the people here do when *this* sort of thing starts?" asked Copper cynically.

"They go in and stay in," replied Tony.

Gimlet looked at him. "That gives me an idea," he said pensively. "We shall have to go through the *kampong* to reach the jungle track that leads to the old temple. My intention, as you know, was to stay here until daybreak. It might be better if we could get through without being seen. If this storm is going to drive everyone indoors now's our time. The lightning should help us to find our way. In any case, I'd as soon be moving as sit here to be torn to pieces by these devilish mosquitoes."

The others were all in favour. "Anything was better than doing nothing," declared Copper.

"We could do no harm by trying it," said Tony. "This jungle path may not be easy to find. I've never seen it, of course. Originally it was the road that led to the temple, and provided it hasn't got too overgrown, once we are on it we should be all right. We should at least be near the temple when it gets light. I agree it's much better not to let the natives see us. All natives are inquisitive, and while these wouldn't hurt us, I'm sure, they'd certainly wonder what four white men were doing here. They'd probably spy on us to find out. The less they know about our doings the better. If they know nothing they can't tell Tuanik anything, should he come snooping round."

"That makes sense," agreed Gimlet, rising, as the lightning flashed again. "We'll take everything we're likely to want out of the jeep and leave it where it is. We'll camouflage it with bamboo and grass just in case anyone should come this way."

This was obviously a sensible precaution, so returning to the vehicle Gimlet began throwing things out—a chopper, crowbar, a length of rope, a sack and other odds and ends of equipment.

"What's the sack for?" asked Cub.

"We may need something to put the treasure in," answered Gimlet. "Apparently it was in a box originally. If so, the box might have gone rotten, or perhaps been eaten by white ants. A sack doesn't weigh much, and it might be useful so we'll take it along."

A rough cover was soon thrown over the jeep, for there was unlimited material available. As soon as the task was completed to Gimlet's satisfaction, loads were distributed, and to the crash of thunder the party set

off. The lightning was now flashing almost incessantly as the tempest rolled towards them, but so far the rain was limited to a few big drops at intervals.

A more unromantic treasure hunt could hardly have been imagined, thought Cub, as he trudged along in the rear. No one seemed in the least excited about it, although the conditions—the darkness, the rain and the mud—were to some extent responsible for that. The traditional background for treasure hunts, he reflected, was a blue sky, a sunny sea and waving palms. The present expedition reminded him of nothing so much as a weary working party making its way to a front line trench during the war, under an artillery bombardment. If this was a sample of treasure hunting, then it was an over-rated pastime, he decided, as he plodded on under the dripping trees.

CHAPTER XII

SINISTER DEVELOPMENTS

THE march to the *kampong* was made in silence. The conditions were not conducive to conversation. Gimlet strode on ahead, torch in hand, although he seldom had occasion to use it. The lightning provided all the illumination necessary to keep them on the track, the surface of which soon became a quagmire. Copper walked with one eye so to speak on the jungle, which he now regarded with the deepest suspicion. Cub and Tony tramped along behind, shoulders hunched, collars up and caps pulled down over their ears in a futile attempt to prevent the water from running down their necks.

The *kampong*, when they reached it, was to Cub a matter of surprise and slight disappointment. He did not know what he expected to see, but he had assumed that the place would be a more or less civilised community. It was far from that. At the back of his mind he had entertained a vague hope that there would be an inn, or resthouse, where, in an emergency, they could lodge. All he found was native huts, about two dozen of them, of primitive construction, scattered in the most haphazard manner along each side of the track for a distance of two hundred yards or so. Each hut was like the next. From a roughly circular mound of earth, presumably to raise the floor above the level of the surrounding slush, rose several poles to support an *atap* roof, with a deep overhang to form a covered verandah all round the actual dwelling. Of just what this consisted Cub could not see, for the houses were in darkness, as was natural at that hour. Not that he was particularly interested. The *kampong* played no part in their project except as a landmark to help them to find their objective.

Tony, familiar with such habitations in his childhood, said it was a typical native village. Behind each hut would be a small area of cultivated land, where, owing to the richness of the soil, anything would grow. The pens, which they could sometimes see, were for the cattle. Presently they saw some of these cattle. They were buffaloes; big, long-horned beasts. Tony said they were quite tame, and thoroughly domesticated, serving the same purpose as both horses and cows at home.

Near the far end of the village they came upon a house a good deal larger than the rest. There was, moreover, a lamp burning inside, as could be seen from chinks of light round a badly fitting door and windows. Tony said it would be the headman's house, and they were passing it when, close against it and towards the rear, something gleamed with a bright metallic lustre. Cub, wondering what it was, called attention to it, for Gimlet had chosen

that moment to stop, to enable the others to catch up with him. The torch swung round to reveal, to the astonishment of everyone, a motor car, and a modern one at that. The light had been reflected by the glass of its headlamps. Thinking that the vehicle was hardly in keeping with the rest of the establishment, Cub questioned: "Do these people have motor cars?"

"No," answered Tony. "If they do then it's something new. They have no money. What wealth they have is in their cattle."

They were just moving off again when, as if the occupants of the hut had heard the voices and had been prompted to investigate, the door was opened from the inside so that a figure standing on the threshold was silhouetted against the light. An instant later an exceptionally vivid flash of lightning temporarily blinded those standing on the road, and by the time their eyes were readjusted the door was shut.

"That man must have seen us," remarked Tony. "He'll wonder who on earth we are and what we are doing here at this hour."

Nobody answered, for what the headman thought seemed of no importance.

The end of the *kampong* was soon reached. Here the track ended at a large stockade built of stout, roughly-hewn logs. Beyond it was the jungle, black and menacing, creating an impression that, although it had been forced to retreat a little it was only waiting for an opportunity to advance.

Gimlet stopped. "It must be from somewhere near here that the jungle path begins," he stated. "It should be easy enough to find; such things always are on paper—but it's a different matter when you are on the spot faced with realities. I don't think we've much chance of striking it in these conditions. Still, as we're here, we might as well try as stand still. Daylight can't be far off, anyway. We'd better not get scattered or we may have a job to get together again without a lot of shouting. You fellows stand fast while I have a scout round to see if I can spot anything that looks like a path." He walked on, slowly, turning the beam of his torch this way and that, while the others stood watching, able to judge his position by the blurred light; for it was now raining again, steadily, although overhead the worst of the thunderstorm appeared to have passed.

Gimlet was away for some time, and the others found the waiting a weary business. Copper took the opportunity to air his views on Siam, its weather, and treasure hunting generally. "I don't mind a drop o' rain; I ain't afraid o' the dark; but what I *don't* like is serpents," he asserted. "I once saw some at the Zoo. Blimey! They fair gave me the creeps. They shouldn't be allowed."

Eventually Gimlet returned to report failure. “I can’t see any sign of a path,” he told them. “That doesn’t mean there isn’t one. It would be easy to miss a macadam road in these conditions. We shall have to wait, but it won’t be for long. That looks like dawn coming up now.” He pointed to a sickly flush in the eastern sky.

They waited for perhaps half an hour, and by the end of that time the day was definitely breaking. Visibility slowly improved as night gave way to a grey, dismal morning.

“Well, I think we can make a move—” began Gimlet, and then broke off, turning sharply towards the stockade on the outside of which they were still standing. From somewhere not far away had come the sound of crashing undergrowth. A moment later it was followed by a thunder of hoofs accompanied by the frantic lowing of terrified cattle.

“Watch out!” cried Gimlet. “Those cattle are stampeding. If they come this way it may be nasty.”

“I’d say it’s a tiger at them,” opined Tony, as they continued to back away, while the uproar increased. “These wretched people lose half their cattle to tigers,” he added.

“Never mind them, what about us?” snarled Copper. “Snakes, elephants, and now tigers—what sort of a country is this?”

No one answered.

“I think the worst is over,” observed Gimlet presently as the pandemonium slowly died away to an uneasy silence. “Let’s try to find the path before the village people come along to see what the rumpus was about.”

“Yes, I think we’d better do that,” agreed Tony. “Most of these people have guns of one sort or another and they’re liable to blaze away at anything they see moving.”

“I get it,” put in Copper bitterly. “If we don’t get chewed up by a tiger we get shot by some windy——”

“Don’t talk so much,” interposed Gimlet tersely.

“Aye-aye, sir,” sighed Copper.

Gimlet advanced to the fringe of the jungle. Now, in the light, there appeared to be narrow paths leading in several directions, although conspicuous hoof-prints suggested that these were cattle-tracks. One after another was tried, but none penetrated far into the jungle, which meant a return to the starting point. At last, however, one gave better promise, for not only did it lead in the right direction but it still continued on after the cattle-

marks had ended. To call the track a path would be to flatter it. That it had once been a broad road was evident, but now the jungle on either side had so far encroached as to leave only a narrow way. Indeed, it was sometimes necessary to push branches aside in order to advance; but it was at least possible to do this without the aid of cutting tools, which would have been indispensible in the virgin jungle. Under foot the soaking ground was carpeted with lush moss, into which the feet and legs of the explorers sank to the knees, making walking tiresome. Moss also festooned the trees and overhanging branches, from which sprang long sprays of orchids, pitcher plants and many weird vegetable growths. Once the travellers passed a waterhole. From its edge rose some of the magnificent Nipah palms which served everywhere as a roofing material. Springing straight up from the ground the majestic fronds stood like great green feathers, forty feet high. Ferns and fungi flourished side by side. And, of course, there were the lianas, hanging loose or twisting like corkscrews towards the treetops. Birds were rare, but there were many beautiful butterflies. In these Copper had no interest. He was, he said, watching for serpents. And one was seen, in fact, but it was only a small reptile, and it scurried away into the jungle as the party drew near.

They came upon their objective suddenly. Rounding a bend, Gimlet pulled up abruptly and pointed at two monstrous stone dragons that arose from some lalang grass on each side of the path. “Here we are!” he exclaimed, a note of enthusiasm creeping into his voice. “That, I imagine, was the temple gates.”

“That’s right,” answered Tony. “They always put those horrors up to keep away evil spirits.”

(*See p. 155*)

"*That, I imagine was the temple gates.*"

The party moved forward, looking ahead with eager anticipation, and having passed the stone monstrosities emerged into what was, comparatively speaking, an open glade. From a slight eminence, gained by wide, crumbling steps, rose the remains of what had undoubtedly been the temple. In places the walls were still standing, carrying portions of a long upcurled, typically Oriental roof; but for the most part the building was a heap of ruins,

smothered under hummocks of moss and lichen, from which sprang rank weeds. The course of the main structure could still be traced, however, as could the site of some extensive outbuildings—possibly the priest's quarters.

"Now," said Gimlet, coming to a halt, when they reached the main ruin. "Let's get our bearings. We needn't bother with the temple itself. What we're looking for isn't there. There are the palms." He pointed to a rough line of sago palms, the feathery crowns of which rose above a tangle of undergrowth. As he took out the chart he looked at Tony and smiled. "As we used to say when we played hide and seek when we were children, we're getting warm. Now for a grain of rice."

Clearing the moss from the top of what had been the flat stone pillar of a balustrade, he opened the flimsy paper and while the others watched in silence made some measurements with the rice grain. When he had finished he simply said: "Come on—this way; we should soon be able to see what that circle represents. The tomb, and the treasure, should be in the middle of it."

They moved forward, no longer following a path, for there was none. There was simply the clearing, overgrown with a tangle of vegetation, from which, here and there, rose piles of fallen masonry. This covered an area of perhaps two acres.

"It doesn't look as though anybody has been here for a long time," remarked Cub.

"Why should anyone come here?" asked Tony.

"I was thinking of the people in the *kampong*. At home, this would be a popular spot for picnickers."

Tony shook his head. "Not here. No native would come near this place for anything on earth. To them it would be the abode of a hundred different kinds of spook; and who are we to jeer at them for that? We've plenty of superstitious people at home."

"Well, if there are such things as spooks, I reckon this 'ud be as good a place for 'em as any I've seen," observed Copper, making a swipe at an enormous wasp. "As long as they don't disguise themselves as serpents I don't mind," he added.

Gimlet seemed to know what he was doing, pacing carefully and counting his steps, while the others, watching curiously, dawdled along behind him. He soon stopped again, and looking ahead, gave an exclamation of satisfaction as he pointed to a circular pool of water, so round that it was obviously of artificial construction. Indeed, the remains of a stone parapet was proof of that. "We're getting hot," he announced. "This pool must be

what is represented by the circle. We haven't much farther to go." He walked on.

The pool turned out to be quite small, perhaps forty yards across. In the centre of it was a small islet, weed-smothered like everything else. The greater part of it was occupied by structure which had withstood better than the rest the ravages of time. To be more specific, it was a square stone building, very small, perhaps ten or twelve feet long by half that distance wide, and about six feet high. It was cracked, but still entire. Four hideous-looking dragons, erect, with teeth and talons bared, one at each corner, supported a pagoda-like roof of brightly coloured tiles, which, being glazed, carried no moss, but glinted with eerie effect in the light of a watery sun which had managed to struggle through the clouds.

"That," said Gimlet, pointing to the edifice, "must be the tomb. It looks like a mausoleum, anyway. Let's see how deep the water is. I hope it's shallow enough for us to wade across."

They all walked on until the water, black and evil-looking, lay at their feet. Not a ripple ruffled its surface. It might have been a sheet of black glass. In this liquid mirror was reflected with extraordinary clarity the inverted image of everything around it. A magnificent pink water lily that floated on flat, leathery leaves, near the bank, only enhanced the suggestion of artificiality. Two piles of collapsed masonry, opposite each other, one on the bank and the other on the islet, showed that a single arched bridge had once connected them; and this, judging from the absence of moss, had been intact in the not very distant past.

To water in its natural state can be applied adjectives to indicate many moods. A brook can laugh; a river can look cheerful. A lake can look sullen, inviting or menacing. To the sea has been ascribed a thousand habits, agreeable and disagreeable, descriptions which, although fanciful, nevertheless reflect the sensations of the beholder; and these sensations are, of course, largely the result of the atmosphere through which the scene is viewed. Nothing could have looked more harmless than the quiet pool in what had been the garden of the ancient temple; but Cub, staring at it, thought he had never seen a more hostile piece of water in his life. This may have been pure imagination, but if so he was not alone in it. Copper apparently felt the same, for he said, in a queer voice: "I don't like the look o' that." His afterthought struck a more practical note. "I'll bet it's fairly crawlin' with leeches."

"Kashan must have crossed the water to get to the tomb," Gimlet pointed out. Taking his knife from a pocket he cut a sapling, trimmed off the twigs, and tested the pool for depth. It was shallow near the edges, only a matter of

inches; and as far out as he could reach the depth was not more than three feet. “There is this about it,” he averred. “We needn’t be afraid of getting wet. We’re as wet as we can be already. I’m going over.” He started wading. When it was seen that nowhere did the water come up to his waist, the others followed.

“Nothing to it,” said Copper carelessly, shaking water from the legs of his trousers.

By walking slowly round the tomb there was discovered, on the far side, a small door that gave entrance to it. Originally of stout construction, hard wood reinforced with strips of iron, it was now hanging on a single hinge. Rust had played havoc with the metal, and white ants with the woodwork. As far as the explorers were concerned this was all to the good, for to gain admission Gimlet had merely to lift the whole thing aside.

“Well, we shall soon know what this is all about,” he murmured. “I think it would be a good idea if one of us stayed on guard—just in case someone from the village comes along. We shouldn’t be doing this, really, you know,” he went on seriously. “The most certain way to start trouble in any eastern country is to interfere with a burial place of the dead. If word reached the *kampong* of what we were doing here the people there might make things very uncomfortable for us, and we couldn’t blame them for that. Still, having come so far we can’t turn back now. Copper, mount guard.”

“Aye-aye, sir.” Copper took up a position with his back against the rotting door post, an observation point which commanded a view of the whole clearing.

Compelled to stoop on account of the low ceiling, the others went on inside, but before they really had time to examine the place Copper’s voice reached them. It had a curious, nervous ring in it.

“What is it?” asked Gimlet from where he stood.

“I don’t know,” answered Copper, “but I could have sworn I saw the water move a bit, like something underneath was rockin’ it gently.”

“Did you see anything that could have caused it?”

“No, I can’t say as I did.”

“Well, keep your eyes open.”

As far as Cub could see there was still nothing to get excited about. Indeed, there was little to see at all. It was now evident that the outside walls formed a shell, so to speak, for the protection of the tomb proper. This took the form of a rectangular stone sarcophagus of traditional shape. Apart from grotesque ornamentation there was little difference between it and those to be found in any old English churchyard. It comprised two parts. The built-up

walls and a lid which protected beyond them, either for decoration or for the purpose of allowing it to be more easily put in place, since it offered a firm hold for the fingers. The only surprising thing about it was its size. It was only about four feet long by two wide and three deep. It was obvious that if the thing had been designed to hold a body—and it was hard to think of any other purpose for it—the deceased must have been a child, a child of important people, no doubt, since so much ceremony had surrounded its interment.

Gimlet went to one end, and putting the fingers of both hands under the overhanging part of the slab, found that he could move it without any great difficulty. "Get hold of the other end, Cub," he requested. "We'll lift the whole thing off and see what's inside."

For the first time it had struck Cub that they were engaged in a more gruesome enterprise than it had seemed from a distance. It had not occurred to him that the tomb might contain the object for which it was constructed, to wit, a human body. He had supposed, wrongly as it now began to appear, that the sepulchre existed in name only, the occupant having long ago succumbed to the dust and decay that had overtaken the temple. It now began to look as if this might not be the case. And this view received further support when he helped to lift the cover a little to one side. Within, revealed in the light of the torch, reposed a small wooden coffin, apparently in a good state of preservation. The usual handles for easy transportation could be seen on each side.

Cub looked up at Gimlet with doubtful, questioning eyes. "This begins to look like sacrilege," he remarked anxiously.

Gimlet himself seemed worried. "I agree," he said. "But what's the answer? Having come all this way we should be silly to go back without seeing the business through, if necessary to the bitter end. Kashan wouldn't be likely to play a joke on his friend, Tony's father. According to him, the treasure is here. It may be in this coffin—if, in fact, it is a coffin, and not a chest made to look like one. Or it may be underneath it. I'm going to find out before I go."

At this stage of the proceedings, Copper's voice, tense and low, came from outside. Cub did not actually catch what he said, but there was something in his tone, a mixture of alarm and urgency, which was not to be ignored. Gimlet was already on his way out, and Cub, following close behind, saw at a glance what had caused the interruption. It was not a pretty sight, and his mouth took on an unpleasant dryness as he stared at it.

Floating motionless on the placid surface of the water was something that had not been there when they had waded through it. It might easily have been taken for an old log. But Cub knew it was not. It was the almost submerged head of an enormous crocodile. It did not move, but floated there like a piece of bark torn from an old tree; only the eyes, under their projecting covers, which rose clear of the water, betrayed its real character. The creature was gazing at them unwinkingly, with a sort of calculating malevolence.

"Keep still everybody," said Gimlet, slowly drawing his automatic.

There was a minute of silence during which they all stood staring at the reptile, while it returned the gaze, still without moving. Cub went all gooseflesh, as the saying is, at the recollection that so short a time ago they had all calmly waded through that same water. The beast must have been there then.

"I've got a suspicion," said Gimlet softly, "that our ugly visitor isn't entirely wild. Every old croc I've seen, and I've seen plenty in Africa, has been as cunning as a fox. It's hard to get a shot at them. It isn't natural that that old devil should lie there like that, taking no more notice of us than if we were sheep."

"Natural or not, that suits me," muttered Copper. "I 'ope he stays there."

Tony probably provided the true explanation when he said, "It must be one of the old sacred crocodiles. Crocodile worship was a cult here not so long ago. I've heard my father talk of it. It wouldn't surprise me if the only humans this brute has seen were the priests who came to feed it."

"Judgin' by the state of the ruins, and the look in 'is eye, it's a long time since he 'ad a bite," observed Copper. "It begins ter look ter me as if we're on the wrong track, else 'ow did Kashan get 'ere if 'e chose this place ter bury 'is pelf? 'E wouldn't 'ave done wot we did if he'd known that beauty was there."

"The bridge might have been standing then," Gimlet pointed out. "I fancy it was there until recently."

"Maybe Kashan knocked the bridge down behind him, to keep his treasure safe?" suggested Cub.

"He wouldn't have done that without warning my father who would have mentioned it in his letter to me," argued Tony. "I'd say the bridge was standing when Kashan left here, so it would not occur to him that my father would have to wade. It's more likely that someone else knocked it down subsequently—unless, of course, it fell down."

"The people in the *kampong* would know about it, no doubt," put in Gimlet. "Perhaps that's another reason why they give the place a wide berth, as they obviously do, for nobody has used that path we came along for many a day. Still what does it matter? The brute's there. There's no bridge, so unless we do something about it getting back isn't going to be funny."

"No, my oath it ain't," muttered Copper. "You're certainly right there."

"The thing is not to disturb the brute until we're ready to deal with him," decided Gimlet. "I don't think there's much risk of him coming ashore. Let's finish the job inside first, then we'll see about getting off. Copper, you keep an eye on him, but you'd better come inside with us and watch from there. Whatever you do, don't worry him."

"Worry 'im!" cried Copper incredulously. "I ain't likely ter pull 'is tail, you can bet on that!"

They backed slowly to the mausoleum. Copper took up a position just inside from which he could watch the crocodile, now drifting slowly to the far bank near the foundations of the bridge, while the others returned to their task at the tomb.

"Let's get this business settled one way or the other," said Gimlet irritably. "We've been messing about too long as it is."

With Cub and Tony watching in a sort of morbid fascination he turned the beam of the torch on the receptacle. Then, bending down he grasped one of the handles and tested it for weight. "It's pretty heavy, anyway," he said quietly. "If there's a body in it I wouldn't have expected it to weigh as much as that, considering the length of time it must have been here." He dragged the stone cover a little further to one side and gave the receptacle a rough shake. Something inside bumped. There was also a slight rattle.

"Bones," muttered Tony, in a hollow voice, running his tongue over his lips.

"We'll soon see," declared Gimlet in a businesslike voice. "Pass me that crowbar, Cub."

Cub handed him the tool.

Gimlet held the sharp end poised for a moment, then brought it down smartly. The point went right through the woodwork. Then, by twisting it round several times, he enlarged the hole until it was nearly wide enough for a hand to be inserted. He was still engaged in this when, somewhere near at hand, a large bird rose with a loud cackle of alarm. He paused, looking towards the door. "Keep your eyes skinned, Copper. Something put that bird up. It might have been an animal—but it might also have been someone coming up the track."

For a moment Copper did not answer. Then the others, who were watching him, saw him stiffen and back further into the building. Turning, he laid a finger on his lips. “I think it’s Tuanik,” he breathed.

“Anybody with him?” asked Gimlet.

“Yes, there’s three of ’em. Two of ’em ’ave got rifles.”

Cub moved swiftly to a crack in the wall and peeped through. Turning back, looking at Gimlet, he whispered. “It’s Tuanik, Smith and Gray.”

“Where are they?”

“They’ve just come into the clearing. They’re coming this way.”

“Okay, don’t make a sound anyone,” murmured Gimlet.

Silence fell. A damp, sultry, uneasy silence.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT . . .

THE situation remained unchanged for several minutes, and a more dramatic one, thought Cub, could hardly have been arranged by a film director. The ancient ruins, the dripping rain forest, the exotic flowers, the inky pool with its sinister guardian—these things in themselves made a romantic backcloth for a stage on which Fate was now placing its living puppets.

Peering through one of the several cracks in the stonework he had a clear view of it all. The three men had halted about forty yards away and stood looking about them, talking in low tones, as if debating what they should do next. He was puzzled by their arrival at that moment. He could not believe that they—that is, Gimlet's party—had been followed. Indeed, that would hardly have been possible in the darkness and the torrential downpour. It seemed fairly certain that this latest development was not a mere accident, a coincidence. If Tuanik did not actually know they were there he must have had good reason for thinking they were not far away. The attitude of caution he now employed was proof of that. After all, pondered Cub, the men had no definite information that the treasure which they sought so diligently was hidden in the old temple. Thinking the matter over he became more and more convinced that, in spite of their efforts to escape observation, their arrival had been noticed and reported. By whom? Two men at least had seen them. One was the strange creature who had bolted from the outbuilding by Kashan's house; but he had looked more like a wild beast than a spy; and apart from that, it seemed impossible that he could have got word to Tuanik in the time, even had he wanted to do so. Then, of course, there was the man who had opened the door of the headman's hut in the *kampong*. The flash of lightning must have revealed them to him. But who was he to take an interest in their movements? Then Cub remembered the car, and that threw a light on the mystery. No ordinary member of the village community would be likely to possess such a vehicle. The man must have been one of Tuanik's men. He might, conjectured Cub, following this line of thought, have been Gray—a theory that was supported by the fact he had suddenly appeared on the scene. Tuanik must always have been aware that Kashan could only have hidden his treasure chest somewhere near his house. What was more likely therefore, knowing they were in the country, that he should post a man near the spot to keep watch? And again, what was more likely than that man, on such a night, should find refuge from the storm in the only place available—the headman's house? But all this, concluded Cub, was mere surmise. The whys and wherefores did not matter very much. The important thing was,

Tuanik was there. Footmarks in the mud near the stockade would show which way they had gone.

As if to bear out this story the three men now began to cast about, scanning the ground, as well as keeping a sharp look-out around them. In their search for whatever they were looking for they wandered farther away, and presently passed out of sight behind a great mound of rubble that had once been the temple.

Gimlet broke the silence. "They know we're about somewhere," he said softly. "They're looking for us now. In the ordinary way I wouldn't care two hoots about that; they're not the sort to stand up to a square fight. They'd prefer to shoot us down from ambush, and we shall have to watch out they don't do that. Were it not for that infernal crocodile *we'd* do the stalking, and chase them out of it. Unfortunately, the croc is a bit of a problem in itself. To shoot at it would give our position away—not that it's much use shooting at a brute that size with a pistol. Our only game is to sit tight. If Tuanik located us here we should be on a very sticky spot. He'd merely have to sit tight behind cover and knock us off one by one as we tried to get away. Our position would be bad enough without that ugly old devil in the water watching us. He's an ally on the side of the enemy, even though Tuanik is unaware of it. To make things even more tiresome I daren't risk knocking the top off that coffin; it couldn't be done without a certain amount of noise and that's something we've got to avoid."

"I think I could get my hand through the hole you've made even as it is," offered Tony, holding up his fist to demonstrate the size of it.

Gimlet smiled faintly. "Do you feel like putting your hand in?"

"I wouldn't mind."

"It isn't a very nice idea."

"Dead men don't bite—as the pirates used to say," quoted Tony.

"Maybe not, but they ain't exactly a bunch o' violets," put in Copper grimly.

"I'll take a chance," declared Tony, moving into position for the experiment.

With the eyes of the others on his face, in dead silence, and very slowly, he inserted his right hand through the small aperture. From his expression he might have been putting his hand in a wasp's nest. And he might have been stung, too, from the way he caught his breath and snatched his hand out.

"What was it?" asked Gimlet tersely.

"It was cold."

“You wouldn’t expect ter find anyone sweatin’ after bein’ nailed in that box fer a ’undred years, would yer?” sneered Copper sarcastically.

“I touched something smooth,” said Tony in a hollow voice.

Copper drew a deep breath. “ ’Ere, take it easy. You’re givin’ me the pins and needles.”

“What did it feel like?” demanded Gimlet impatiently.

“It might have been a bone—a skull perhaps.”

“Blimey! Stop messin’ about. Pull it out whatever it is an’ let’s ’ave a dekko at it,” growled Copper.

“Shut up, Copper,” snapped Gimlet. “Try again, Tony. Try to imagine you’re at a fair, having a lucky dip.”

Tony was reaching forward again, but Cub, who had taken the opportunity to peep outside, stopped him with a gesture. “They’re coming back,” he breathed. “And they’re coming this way. Keep still. I’ll watch them.” After a brief interval of silence he went on, in a whisper: “They’re coming straight over, and they’re looking at this place as if they’ve got ideas about it.”

Very soon the voices of the men were audible to all. They were speaking in English, presumably for Smith’s benefit. Said Smith, apparently referring to the tomb: “What is that place, anyhow?”

Tuanik answered. “How would I know? Could be a sort of summer house.”

“What about having a look in it?”

“They ain’t there,” put in Gray. “If they were we should have seen or heard something of them.”

“I didn’t say they were there,” grumbled Smith. “I said let’s have a look inside. It’s as good a place to wait as anywhere we’ve seen. We could see all round, and we should have a roof over our heads if the rain started again. There’s more to come by the look of the sky.”

This, thought Cub, was a perfectly reasonable suggestion. But what about the crocodile, that now floated motionless, almost submerged, near the water-lily. It suddenly struck him, and struck him with a shock, that the men had not yet noticed it. Still, that was understandable.

“To get over there would mean getting wetter than we are,” muttered Gray, who was obviously against the plan. Perhaps he objected to getting his smart clothes in a worse mess than they were already.

“I guess I can fix that,” asserted Smith. “That log should be long enough to reach across the ends of the broken bridge.” And with that, apparently to

save further argument, he stepped forward to put his plan into execution.

Cub nearly cried out aloud instinctively from sheer horror as the man casually waded into the water and grasped what he took to be a log, roughly, with the obvious object of swinging it round. This treatment however, was more than the crocodile, lethargic though it seemed to be, was prepared to tolerate.

Smith realised his mistake instantly, of course, for the supposed log had moved at once, slowly at first, and then with a speed which Cub could hardly believe possible. It swung round with a tremendous swirl. Smith, with a gasp of dismay, leapt back, or tried to, as was natural enough; but the water impeded his movements and in his haste he stumbled and fell. A scream of stark terror broke from his lips. The next moment the water was lashed into spray and foam by the crocodile's tail as man and beast struggled in what appeared to be a ghastly embrace.

It must be admitted that the wretched man's companions did all in their power to save him. They brought their rifles to bear and opened a rapid fire, although how they could hope to hit the crocodile without hitting the man was not clear. They certainly hit something, for the white foam was soon laced with crimson.

It was all over in about a minute. Man and beast disappeared. A surge of water showed which way they had gone. Then the pool settled down. A gentle lapping at the bank was the only sign that it had been disturbed. Tuanik and Gray, their faces grey-green under their dark skins, stood staring with horror-filled eyes at the place where their comrade had disappeared.

Cub, dry-lipped and trembling, looked at Gimlet, who had not moved. His expression gave no indication of what he was thinking; but even he, war-hardened as he was to the sight of sudden death, was pale. Copper was wiping perspiration from an ashen face with a dirty handkerchief. Tony leaned against the far wall, his hands over his face. Still nobody dare speak.

It was some time before anyone spoke. Then the first words came from outside, from Tuanik. "Come away," he said in a thin dry voice. "Let's get out of this. At least we know they're not over there," he added, with a shrill falsetto laugh which revealed the state of his nerves. He indicated the tomb.

"I never did think they were there," answered Gray, thickly. "I said so before it happened—but no, he must have his own way. I don't reckon they're here at all," he went on. "They may have been and gone. While we're blundering about here they might slip away. I said——"

"All right—I know what you said," snarled Tuanik.

"I said——"

"I know what you said—how many times do you want me to tell you?" Tuanik's voice rose to a shout. For a moment it looked as if the altercation would end in blows.

"I was only going to say," insisted Gray venomously, "that if we'd done what I said we'd have saved all this trouble. Let them get the stuff, I said. Let's find their car, that's what I wanted to do. We know they brought one and it can't be far away. We saw the wheel tracks. We could have followed them easy enough in daylight. That was the time to grab 'em. That was my idea—but no——"

"It may not be too late for that even now," returned Tuanik. "They don't seem to be here. Let's get back. This is a hell of a place, anyhow. We were warned in the *kampong* that it was haunted."

"If they'd told us about that crocodile," rasped Gray, "there wouldn't have been . . ."

His voice died away as the two men departed, picking their way through the rubble, to disappear presently down the track that led to the *kampong*.

Tony was the first to break the silence inside the tomb. "Well, that's the end of one of the men who killed my father," he said in a flat sort of voice.

"Aye, and no 'angman could 'ave made a better job of it," asserted Copper. "It's given the others somethin' ter think about too, my oath it 'as! I shan't forgit this in a 'urry meself."

"We've still got to get across that water ourselves," Gimlet, always practical, pointed out.

"I ain't forgot that, neither," muttered Copper. "Maybe now the croc 'as 'ad 'is dinner he'll 'ave a nap," he suggested hopefully.

"Let's go and see if we can spot him," said Gimlet, leading the way outside.

It did not take them long to find the beast. It was lying in shallow, bloodstained water, upside down, either dead or dying. Apparently some of the bullets fired at it had gone home. Gimlet said he thought he could see the body of the man it had killed lying farther out in deeper water. No one felt inclined to investigate.

"That's the biggest croc I ever saw," observed Gimlet. "It must have been of great age. Well, I don't think he'll trouble anyone again. Come on." He led the way back to the tomb. "Now, let's get this part of the business settled," he went on, when they were inside. "I've been thinking about it. This isn't the original coffin. In this steamy atmosphere it would have rotted away long ago. I'm sure this must be a comparatively new one. In fact, it may not be a coffin at all, but a chest made to look like one, as I said just

now. Kashan might have had a box made to look like a coffin to prevent superstitious people from touching it. That would be a typical Oriental trick. However, we'll soon see."

While he had been speaking Gimlet had picked up the crowbar, and with the end of it he now proceeded to make the hole larger until he was satisfied that he had done enough to suit his purpose. Throwing down the bar he inserted his hand. The others, watching, saw a slow smile spread over his face. Then, quite calmly, he said: "Boys, this is it." Carefully withdrawing his hand he brought with it, and exposed in the palm, an exquisitely carved lotus flower in white jade. "This is what you thought was bone," he told Tony. "It's cold and smooth. The chest seems to be full, but most of the stuff is wrapped up in muslin, or rag of some sort—to prevent it from being damaged, I suppose. We'll leave the things as they are for the time being."

(See p. 173)

"*Boys, this is it.*"

"D'you mean ter say you're not goin' to 'ave a dekko at the swag after all?" inquired Copper in a pained voice.

"It will travel better as it is," replied Gimlet. "To unpack it we should have to break the lid off, and we've no means of putting it on again. To unpack it and then put it all back would take a lot of time, anyway, and with

Tuanik in the offing the sooner we start the better. We shall have plenty of time to examine everything when we've got it back to the yacht."

Disappointing though this decision was to the others the wisdom of it could not be denied, so no one demurred.

"How are you going to carry it?" asked Tony. "If the natives see you carting off what they'll suppose is the coffin of one of their ancestors there'll be the dickens of a row. It would be crazy to try to carry a thing like that through the *kampong*."

"Yes, that's true," agreed Gimlet. "I'll tell you what we'll do," he went on. "We've got a rope. We'll sling it to a pole so that Copper and I can carry it between us, the pole on our shoulders. It would be a pretty heavy load for one. We needn't take it all the way. We need only carry it to somewhere near the edge of the jungle, by that stockade, say. We could hide it there, and wait by it, while Copper went up for the jeep. That, I think, would be the easiest way."

"What about Tuanik and Gray?" reminded Cub. "Their plan, you remember, was to find our transport and wait there for us to come back."

"We'll deal with that in due course," promised Gimlet. "For the moment, let's make a start. If we can get this a part of the way it will be something. I'll think the matter over as we go along."

A few minutes were occupied in getting the box out of its container. Then Gimlet asked Copper to slip across to the forest and cut a stout bamboo.

"I hope that croc hasn't got a pal," said Copper, as he entered the water. However, nothing happened, and he was soon back with a suitable pole. To this the chest was slung by the rope through the handles. Gimlet threw the sack over the whole thing. Then he and Copper lifting it shoulder high between them, they moved off. Cub led the way and Tony brought up the rear.

A halt was called where the jungle track began at the far side of the clearing. A quick survey was made, but as this revealed no sign of Tuanik or his partner the journey was continued.

"Strewth! We shall 'ave 'ad enough of this by the time we get there," observed Copper, as he re-shouldered the burden.

"I've got an idea," announced Tony, suddenly. "If anyone should see us, let's pretend to be orchid hunters. The people here must be used to that. This is a great country for orchids. Professional hunters come here to collect them."

“By thunder! I’d believe that,” declared Copper. “I’ve bin wonderin’ what this place reminded me of, now I remember. I went ter Kew once, with a bloke who was balmy on flowers, and I nearly choked ter death in the orchid ’ouse. This place stinks jest the same.”

“I think that’s a very good scheme, Tony,” complimented Gimlet, ignoring Copper’s remark. “Pick some orchids.”

There was no difficulty about this, and between them Cub and Tony soon had the top of the sack decorated with long sprays of the fragile-looking blooms. These also helped to hide the “coffin.”

“We look more like a bloomin’ funeral than ever,” was Copper’s observation, as the march was resumed. “Wot a party! Treasure huntin’, eh? I remember on D-Day I carried——”

“Save your breath,” interrupted Gimlet. “You’ll need it before we’ve finished.”

“Aye-aye, sir,” agreed Copper sadly.

CHAPTER XIV

TIGER FODDER

AFTER several rests and readjustments of the load the strange procession at length drew near the *kampong*. Another heavy shower did nothing to enliven the proceedings, but still, with the success of the expedition in sight—or so it seemed—everyone was in good spirits.

It was not until the party was within a quarter of a mile of the stockade that bounded the eastern end of the village that anything out of the ordinary occurred. A look-out was being kept for a suitable place to "park the swag," as Copper put it, when, rounding a bend, a buffalo came into view. It was standing across the path, head held low, staring fixedly into the jungle; and far from showing any hostility or even concern at the approach of the cavalcade, it did not as much as turn its head. Tony reassured everyone by saying that it was a tame beast, which, indeed, was obvious, for not only was it tethered to a post driven into the ground but it carried on its back some primitive harness. In spite of its enormous horns it was a miserable-looking creature, thin, and mud plastered, and clearly very old.

"Queer place to tie a beast," remarked Gimlet, as the party drew near, and halted, for it was evident that the animal, which almost blocked the path, would have to be moved to let them through. Cub was moving forward—a trifle nervously, it must be confessed—to do what was necessary, when from somewhere near at hand a voice spoke, or rather, chattered, as an ape suddenly alarmed might have done. The sound came from somewhere so close that everyone started and looked quickly round.

It was Tony who spotted the speaker, and pointed him out to the others. It was a man, an old and almost naked native, who squatted on a rough platform made in the fork of a tree that overhung the track. In his hands he held an old-fashioned, long-barrelled musket. Seeing that he was observed he spoke again, accompanying his words with quick gestures.

"What's he saying?" Gimlet asked Tony.

"He says . . . he says He is looking at us," answered Tony, in a sort of strangled voice.

"He? Who does he mean by He?" demanded Cub.

"He means a tiger."

Copper jumped. "A *what*!"

"A tiger. They never call a tiger by name in these parts. It's always He."

Copper frowned. "Are you kiddin'?"

"I am not."

By this time everyone was staring into the jungle, as far as that was possible.

"I don't see no tiger," asserted Copper, not without a trace of nervousness.

The old man in the tree spoke again, with even greater urgency and gestures now eloquent.

Tony translated. "He says the buffalo is a bait. The tiger has been stalking it for some minutes. He could hear its tail dragging through the dead leaves."

The old man spoke yet again, and again Tony translated—this time in a very small voice. "He says—it's glaring at us."

During all this time the buffalo had not moved, but still stood gazing into the jungle as if something there fascinated it. Cub stared in the same direction but could see nothing.

The man in the tree spoke again, waving his arms.

Said Tony: "He wants us to get out of the way so that he can shoot it when it springs."

"I ain't arguin' about that, my oath I ain't," declared Copper. "Come on."

"Just a minute," put in Gimlet, who also had been making a careful scrutiny of the jungle. "There's no need to get in a panic over an odd tiger, even if there is one in the vicinity. He'll be more interested in the buffalo than in us, anyway. I've got an idea. Our scheme for hiding the chest in the jungle isn't going to work, if there's a tiger scare on. We shall be watched. Apart from the hunter there may be others watching. We'd better hang on to the chest, but I don't feel like carrying it all the way to the jeep. That wretched animal could carry it for us. Tony, ask the old man if he will sell it."

Tony put the question, and having received a reply, conveyed the answer to Gimlet. "He says it's a fine beast and we can have it for fifty dollars. Personally, I don't think it's worth ten."

"No matter. Tell him I'll have it," decided Gimlet.

There was another brief conversation at the end of which Tony said: "He says put the money on the ground where he can see it and we can take the beast. He refuses to come down."

"And 'e ain't such a fool as 'e looks, either," muttered Copper.

Gimlet counted out the money and put it on a large leaf in full view of the man in the tree. This done he ordered Cub to untie the rope by which the animal was tethered. “Bring it along,” he concluded, when Cub, with nervous haste, had complied.

The animal was at first unwilling to move, but eventually Cub managed to get its head round; whereupon its manner changed and it seemed only too ready to depart. In fact, it set off down the track at a pace which nearly dragged Cub off his feet. They travelled together for some distance before he could stop it, in order to let the others catch up. Even then it remained restive, and it was only after a good deal of trouble that the load was secured to its back, the same rope as before being used for the purpose. The sack was put over it and the orchids piled on top. Streaming faces were mopped with handkerchiefs that had become mere sweat-rags. Gimlet took the leading rope from Cub. “Come on, old cow,” he said cheerfully.

At that moment the tiger sprang; and there was nothing half-hearted about its attack. It all happened in a flash. No one was prepared, and the result was instant pandemonium. The buffalo bellowed. Gimlet shouted. Copper swore.

It was fortunate, but quite natural, that the tiger, actuated possibly by the thought of losing its prey, should choose the buffalo for its victim. Cub caught a fleeting glimpse of the great striped body as it catapulted from the jungle, and automatically jumped backwards to get as far away from it as possible. In doing this he collided violently with Tony who was just behind him. They both went over backwards. Copper, in his haste to get to the nearest tree, fell over Cub, who, thinking it was the tiger, added his voice to the uproar. By the time they had sorted themselves out and scrambled to their feet—an operation conducted with an alacrity that can be better imagined than described—the buffalo was in full flight down the track, its frantic bellowing blending with the furious roaring of the tiger which, rising on its hind legs, strove to pull its victim down, a circumstance that was prevented by the load it carried. In its efforts it got its claws entangled in the sack, which, not being fastened, slipped off, so that the tiger fell heavily. It was up again in a flash, however, and was overtaking the buffalo in great leaps when both animals disappeared round the next bend. At no great distance behind them raced Gimlet.

Cub, shaken by shock and stunned by the enormity of the catastrophe, could only stand staring, muttering incoherently. And the others were in little better case. Copper was the first to pull himself together. In a high falsetto voice he shouted, pointing down the track: “Look at ’im—chasin’ a

tiger! 'E must be nuts." Then, disciplinary training overcoming all other emotions, he tore off in pursuit. Cub and Tony followed.

It was the white jade lotus flower lying beside the track that gave Cub an idea of what was happening, and what to expect. Other objects appeared at closer intervals, so that the track soon looked as if it had been the trail of a paper chase. Here and there were strips of wood. It was apparent that either the chest had been bumped to pieces by the terror-stricken buffalo in its efforts to escape or else it had been ripped open by the claws of its assailant. Anyway, the result was the same; the contents of the chest were strewn all along the track. Feeling sick with mortification Cub started to pick the objects up, a task in which he was joined by Tony, and by the time they reached the bend, they both had their arms, as well as their pockets, full. Gimlet and Copper now came into view, standing beside the splintered chest which, at the finish, apparently, had come adrift. Neither tiger nor buffalo was in sight. In fact, neither was ever seen again. Gimlet, as well as Copper, looked thoroughly shaken, which in the circumstances was hardly surprising. However, he was not long taking steps to get the situation in hand.

"Copper, go and get the sack," he ordered. "This box is no use. Come on, you boys, get cracking and collect the stuff. Make a dump here. I'll pack it in the sack—there's nothing else. Jump to it, before that old fellow in the tree comes along to see what all the fuss was about."

Then began as curious a scene as was ever beheld on a jungle trail—the collection of priceless works of Oriental art that lay strewn, half buried in moss, mud and water, over a distance of a quarter of a mile. From some of the items the wrappings had fallen off. From some they fell off as the article was retrieved. There were ornaments and carved figures in ivory, and jade of all colours; little lacquer boxes and caskets containing they knew not what, for there was no time to investigate. Exquisite gold and silver filigree work was brought to the dump with pendants of rubies and emeralds, necklaces of rose coral, amber, and pearls. For twenty minutes the collection of these continued, to be taken to Gimlet, who re-wrapped each article carefully. Copper returned with the sack and into it, carefully packed with moss and leaves, the jewels were stored for transport. Whether or not everything was picked up could not be ascertained, of course, as there was no inventory of the contents of the chest; but the search continued while anything could be found, and, indeed, for some time afterwards.

At last Gimlet said: "I think we've got the lot—or as much as we shall ever find. Come on, let's push on to the jeep. We'd better put this thing out of sight." Picking up the remains of the treasure chest he threw it as far as he

could into the dense undergrowth. “You’d better carry the sack for a bit, Copper, while the rest of us do escort in case that infernal tiger comes back this way,” he went on. Then he laughed, shortly. “My little scheme for easy transport didn’t work out very well, I’m afraid—to say nothing of fifty dollars thrown away.”

“That fifty dollars worth o’ cat’s meat was better than bein’ tiger fodder ourselves,” grunted Copper, as he hoisted the sack on his shoulders and resumed the interrupted march.

There were few people to be seen as they tramped through the *kampong*. It seemed that most of the men, women and children, were at work in the paddy fields, where they could sometimes be observed, ankle deep in mud, bending over their crops. Few noticed the four white men, and those who did merely gazed with expressionless faces. As the party passed the headman’s house Cub remarked that the car had gone. Wheel marks, not yet washed out by the rain, suggested that only a short time had elapsed since its departure. The marks showed that the car had headed for the main road although this, of course, was the only direction it could go, since the track was a cul-de-sac that ended at the stockade. Gimlet said he thought they might see the car again, if, as they supposed, it belonged to Gray, or Tuanik’s agents. However, when they reached the drive that led to the remains of Kashan’s house the wheel marks ran straight on past it.

A halt was now called to discuss the best method of procedure, for no one had forgotten that Tuanik’s intention had been to find the jeep and wait in ambush near it. There was, of course, nothing to show that he had found the jeep, but it could be presumed that he would not overlook in his search so suitable a place as Kashan’s overgrown garden—which was, in fact, apart from the road itself, the only open area for some distance. Gimlet averred that if Tuanik was waiting for them, then it would be as well for them to have their hands free. The sack was heavy, and apart from the labour of carrying it up the hill it would be in the way. In any case, he said, he did not like the idea of taking the treasure with them into what might turn out to be a difficult and dangerous situation. For the same reason he was opposed to breaking up the party. To leave any member of it on guard over the sack would be to expose him to danger, for should he be discovered by the enemy, who, after all, might be anywhere, he would probably lose his life. In the end it was decided to hide the sack just inside the jungle, at any rate for the time being. The next few minutes would show how the land lay. If all went well they would soon be back with the jeep. This, accordingly, was done.

Commando methods were employed in the approach to the ruins. Mud-stained clothes were made even more inconspicuous by the addition of sprigs of leaves broken from the undergrowth, and what with this, and the poor visibility due to rain dripping from the trees, it would have needed sharp eyes indeed to observe their arrival at the edge of the clearing. Everyone with the exception of Tony, who was ordered to follow behind, was an old hand at the game, but Cub, for one, recaptured some of the thrill of his war-time exploits. The only sound that could be heard was the persistent drip, drip, drip, as the trees discharged their surplus water.

As things turned out these elaborate precautions were unnecessary, for a factor outside their calculations now took part in the proceedings. The first indication of this came as, slowly and with infinite caution, they advanced to the place where the virgin jungle broke down to the clearing that had once been a garden. Here, without the slightest warning, the moist atmosphere was rent by a scream so piercing and so horrible that Cub stopped dead with the beads of perspiration on his forehead seeming to turn to ice-water. Gimlet made a swift signal to Copper and ran forward. Copper followed and Cub did the same, and was thus in time to witness the climax of a drama which there had been no reason to suspect.

Near the smoke-blackened ruins were three men—Tuanik, Gray, and a native, Tuanik and Gray being distinguished by their European clothes. Their attitudes might have been those of actors in a melodrama posing for a photograph. Gray was on his knees, a hand pressed to his side, coughing. A short distance away Tuanik and the native were locked in what is sometimes called a life and death struggle. The right arm of the native was held high by Tuanik, who held it by the wrist; and there was good reason for this, for in his hand the native held a long curved dagger. For a moment or two this tableau persisted with little or no change; then the two struggling men fell, as if one had slipped and brought the other down with him. The native was quickly uppermost, and tearing his arm free, drove home the dagger several times with a force terrible to see. It was as if fury, long suppressed, was being discharged. By this time, Gray, as if suddenly aware of what was happening, was also moving. Still on his knees he picked up a rifle that had lain in the grass, and taking quick aim at the native as the man began to rise, fired. The dark body went rigid, and then, quite slowly, collapsed. Gray, as if the effort had been too much for him, dropped the rifle and slid forward like a swimmer in smooth water.

Now all this had occupied only a few seconds of time, during which Gimlet, automatic in hand, had covered the intervening distance. He paused when he reached Gray, looked down, and went on to the others. He

shrugged, and returned the pistol to his pocket. When Copper and Cub ran up he simply said: “It seems that there was more in this affair than we knew.” While the others watched in silence he pulled the native clear of the body of the man he had slain, and examined both for signs of life. “No use —they’ve had it,” he said rising, and walked back to Gray. The man was not dead, but he expired before anything could be done to help him.

Gimlet drew a deep breath and lit a cigarette. “Well, that’s that,” he said quietly. “There was nothing we could do about it. There were no earlier shots or we should have heard them. What happened, I think, was this. Tuanik and Gray came here, as they said, looking for us. This native was here. He went for them. He must have stalked them, and jumped out at them, getting his knife into Gray before either of them could use their rifles. The native, having stabbed Gray, then went for Tuanik, and it was at that moment we arrived on the scene. I fancy this native is the man we saw here last night. Why—unless he was crazy—he should attack Tuanik and Gray is something we may never know.”

Tony, who had been staring hard at the face of the native, spoke for the first time. “I think I can give you the answer to that,” he said, surprisingly. “I know this fellow. He was one of Kashan’s personal servants—the very one, in fact, who brought the letter to my father. His name was Kling. He was afterwards caught, you remember, and tortured—as it rather looks, by Tuanik. It was supposed that at the finish he was murdered, but he must have got away. Look at the scars on his face! Poor man, no wonder he looked ghastly in the light of the torch last night. When he escaped he must have come back here like a wounded animal making for its den. This was his home, anyway, and he had nowhere else to go. By the time he got here the place had been burnt down by treasure hunters. He must have been here ever since, living like a wild beast, hoping, perhaps, that Tuanik would come back to have another look for Kashan’s money.”

“And that, really, is what did happen,” said Gimlet softly. “Tuanik and Gray were hoping to ambush us, instead of which they were ambushed themselves. Funny how things so often work out that way. Well, I shan’t shed any tears on their account. They were a pretty pair of rascals, and they’ve got no more than they deserve.”

“Yes,” said Tony in a hard voice. “I haven’t forgotten that they hounded my father to death.”

“Well, the public executioner couldn’t ’ave made a better job of ’em,” put in Copper philosophically. “What are we goin’ ter do abaht this, skipper?”

"Nothing," answered Gimlet. "I don't see that there is anything we can do. Strictly speaking, what has happened here is no concern of ours. Let's clear out and leave the authorities to grapple with the problem—if they ever learn about it, which I don't think they will. There are a lot of hungry creatures in the jungle, and in forty-eight hours all that will remain here will be bones. We're not in the best of shape ourselves. The sooner we can get near some hot water the better. Let's go." He turned towards the jeep, which, to Cub's relief, had evidently not been discovered. At any rate, it had not been touched.

Copper took the wheel and drove the car down the slope to the drive entrance. After a brief halt to collect the treasure the homeward journey was begun.

A hundred yards along the track they came upon the mysterious car, parked as close to the jungle as was possible.

"So it *was* their car," observed Gimlet. "They must have guessed we'd seen it and ran it up here out of the way. Well, it will be something for the little boys of the *kampong* to play with. Keep going, Copper."

Copper drove on. "Keep yer eyes open for serpents," he requested.

To Cub, the return journey to the coast was never more tangible than a dream, and a hazy one at that. To say that he slept would not be entirely true: the pelting rain, the hard seats and the bumping over an indifferent road, were not conducive to sleep, weary though he was. His condition might best be described as an uneasy doze. Tony, however, worn out with fatigue and mental strain, sank into a sort of coma with his head in Cub's lap.

The only break in the journey came when Gimlet, who happened to be driving—he and Copper had been taking turn and turn about—pulled up at The Little Lotus Flower and requested tea. Mr. Loo obliged. He gave them a queer look, but being a man of good taste, asked no questions. With the tea he brought soft, sweet, sticky cakes, and these refreshments put new life into the party, as the saying is. Copper stayed in the jeep. He said he was taking no chances of having to walk home.

As soon as the tea was gulped down the journey was continued, still in pouring rain, and in due course completed without incident. Gimlet made a signal to the yacht. The watch was on the look-out, and a boat was soon alongside the wharf to fetch them. The sack, filthy beyond description, was put aboard. As Tony remarked, nobody seeing it would guess what was in it. Which was true, for a more unlikely-looking treasure bag would be hard to imagine.

"What are yer goin' ter do about the jeep?" Copper asked Gimlet.

"We'll leave it where it is," decided Gimlet. "I only bought it second-hand from the disposal people, so I don't think a delay is worth risking. Tuanik may have powerful friends in Bangkok who could still make things awkward for us. It can stay where it is as a parting gift to Siam."

Five minutes later they were on the yacht, and Gimlet's first action was to tell the skipper that all was well and he could cast off. As he remarked to the others, they had got what they came for, so the sooner they were out of Siamese waters the better. "What we all need most, I think, is a bath. Then you boys had better get some sleep."

"Ain't yer goin' ter look at wot's in the sack?" asked Copper in a disappointed voice.

"We shall have nothing else to do all the way home," answered Gimlet, in a tone that did not invite argument. "I'll take it with me to my cabin. Off you go."

As the party dispersed the bell in the engine room rang. The deck quivered. A hawser splashed.

"Well 'ere we go," said Copper. "If that's Siam you can 'ave it. Give me good old London, smoke an' all, every time."

. . . . . .

There is little more to tell. Six weeks later, after an easy passage, the *Sally* was back at her own moorings. After thanking the skipper and his crew for their co-operation Gimlet took the party back to Scotland, to the Lodge, where the interrupted holiday was completed, unmarred by the sinister presence of unwelcome visitors from the Orient.

On Gimlet's advice, Tony sent nearly all the objects of art to a well-known London firm of auctioneers. Each member of the party, however, kept one item for a souvenir, making his own choice. Each chose a piece of carved jade to suit his taste. Copper's selection was a reproduction of a mongoose killing a cobra!

The objects sent to London realised an even bigger sum of money than Gimlet expected, possibly because the sale was attended by collectors from all over the world. The total amounted to nearly a quarter of a million pounds, which Tony insisted on sharing with his friends. To this they could not consent, however, although in the end each accepted what he considered to be a fair proportion for the services he had rendered.

So, as the murderers had paid for their crime, even though it was not at the hands of the law, everyone had cause to feel satisfied with the outcome

of an affair which, starting on the banks of a Highland river, had ended in the wilds of an Eastern jungle.

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.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *Gimlet's Oriental Quest* by Capt. W. E. (William Earl) Johns]