

The Tentacles of Evil

Beatrice Redpath

Illustrated by
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THE TENTACLES OF EVIL

By BEATRICE REDPATH
ILLUSTRATED BY NORMAN PRICE

Out of the jungle groped slimy feelers, reaching for Is'bel. All the sinister forces worked to one end, and the battle that Ian did for his rescued one seemed waste of strength until—but let Mrs. Redpath tell it in her own enthralling way.

Ian sat opposite Is'bel eating his breakfast in silence, in the comfortable little dining room over the second-hand bookstore. There had been no quarrel between them; their marriage was a happy one; but still a sense of fear kept continually pulling at his elbow ever since he had realized the gradual encroaching menace of the slums. The little shop was in a backwater that was being engulfed by the poorer districts surrounding it.

Ian was a dreamer, wrapped up in his books. An enthusiastic reader of adventures in unheard of places, he got many a vicarious thrill from the horrors of the unspeakable jungle. For him the jungle held a fascination that obtruded on his every-day life. To him the jungle was a living force, treacherous, magnetic, gruesome.

In the midst of his reading one evening, Is'bel had appeared, precipitated by a sudden thunderstorm. She became to him, this little slum child, a symbol of the jungle. A strange denizen, too, an anomaly in slum land. For in spite of her lack of moral values, with all the curiosity of a wild thing, she had the charm of the snowdrop growing in some dingy backyard. That had been the first of many meetings, till gradually he had begun to find the jungle not so interesting unless it were shared with her.

The agony of the time when she had been absent. That dreadful time when they had convicted her of shop-lifting. Well, that was past. He had finally determined that she should not become one of the jungle folk. So he had married Is'bel and taken her away from the jungle which threatened to engulf her.

It was too much to expect a complete reclamation on the instant. Habits, unlike fetters, cannot be so easily cast aside. Is'bel loved him with all the passion of her fierce nature and if she had failed him as in that case of the customer's bag, which fortunately he had been in time to prevent her stealing,

he had realized the insidious call of the jungle and had patiently fought with and for her, sure of the final outcome; certain that in the last summation love would be the weapon with which good would triumph over evil.

But now the jungle was creeping up on them. He felt sure that Is'bel would be happier away from everything that reminded her of the past. He had seen the house he wanted to buy across the park, a tall, narrow building on a broad, well paved street. It was well aired and faced the open spaces of the park. He had taken Is'bel to see it one day. She had been delighted with everything about it. Her quick mind had grasped immediately the possibilities of the large rooms upstairs which could easily be converted into living quarters. Ian felt that it was just what he wanted, but he would have to wait until he could dispose of his old property.

"I'm going to see that house agent again this afternoon," he finally roused himself to say, going over to the mantelpiece for his pipe. "Would you mind being left alone to look after the store for a while?"

"Why would I mind?" Is'bel asked, lifting her face with its sweet, irregular features as he paused beside her chair; "isn't it my business as well as yours to look after the store? You'd think I was just a doll to be fussed up and put in a chair to sit still the way you treat me."

He laughed down into her clear, amber eyes.

"No one could turn you into a doll. You work too hard altogether."

"It's only ladies who can do nothing elegantly, and I'm no lady," she said, shaking her head solemnly.

A spark of laughter flashed into Ian's gray eyes.

"Well, don't turn yourself into one if it's going to make you different. I like you just the way you are."

"I'm not so sure that I like myself," she said with a shadow flitting over her face. Ian knew instinctively that she was recalling what had happened three months ago, and he laid his hand very tenderly on her copper-colored hair.

"I won't have you disparaging what belongs to me," he said, trying to dispel that shadow, and bring the flashing light back into her face.

Ian went that afternoon to see the house agent.

Something had happened in the neighborhood several days before, which had made him decide that he would sell the store at any price and move

away from that locality. A jeweller had been shot in his shop and a large quantity of jewels had been stolen. Ian had no fear that his store would be robbed, for bookstores were no temptation to thieves, but he didn't like the idea of Is'bel living in a neighborhood where that kind of thing was going on.

The house agent gave him very little hope, however, of an early sale. People were not buying in that locality; stores were moving further uptown. The tide of progress was swiftly sweeping north and west. On the south-east side of the city only the dregs would remain. If Ian sold he would have to accept a loss, but he was prepared to do so. This recent event had made him feel that he must get rid of the store even if it went for a very low figure. The agent promised to try his best to bring about a sale, and with that Ian was obliged to be content.

It was dusk as he came back through the park, a gentle blue that melted substance into shadow until even the wrought-iron gates of the park appeared soft and vaporish. Ian walked quickly, his footsteps ringing out sharply on the hard, gravelled paths which were deserted at this hour. As he turned out of the park he noticed that a house at the corner of his own street had hung out a "for sale" sign. Soon a dozen families would be habited there and the house would have all the appearance of a slattern with unwashed face and uncombed hair. That was what was happening on all sides, even in the streets which had until recently held themselves aloof from the encroaching slums. Tiny shops were springing up like fungi of evil growth, places where queer-looking foreigners gathered in the evenings, and where there was always the sound of rattling bottles and the tinkle of glasses coming through the open doorways.

Yes, decidedly he wanted to get Is'bel away from this locality. His thoughts flashed back to that first evening when she had come into his store for protection from the rain-slashed night. Even that first evening his heart had gone out to her brave, gay courage. Little child of the slum. How much she had grown to mean to him since then! Was he really as sure as he told himself he was that Is'bel would never return to the old ways?

As he passed the jeweller's store that had been the scene of the late robbery he saw a group of idlers lounging in front of it, discussing the robbery. Ian felt that in all probability some of them knew a great deal more than they pretended to know. He quickened his steps as he went by. Yes, he would be more than thankful to leave this neighborhood.

The lights shone out from his own bookstore, making squares of light on the pavement, and as he came nearer he saw the door open and a man came out and stood looking down the street. As Ian passed under a street

lamp the man rapidly crossed the road and was swallowed up in the mouth of a lane opposite. Ian looked after him curiously, wondering who it would be. Ian's customers did not belong to this neighborhood. They usually came in motors. It was seldom that anyone living in this neighborhood visited the store.

Is'bel was standing beside the magazine table, turning over the pages of an illustrated magazine. Her vivid face brightened as he came in.

“Who was only going to be gone an hour?” she cried.

“I know. The agent kept me talking and I had no idea it was so late. Who was that who just went out?”

“How could anyone go out when no one came in?”

Ian looked at her in astonishment.

“Why, I saw a man just come out and go across the street. He went into the lane opposite.”

She shook her head, fluttering the pages of the magazine with nervous, restless fingers.

“There's been no one here since you went out. Not a soul.”

“But I saw him. A small man wearing a cap. I was coming along on this side of the street when he came out. I saw him standing looking down the street. I couldn't possibly have been mistaken.”

Again she shook her head.

“You were seeing things, I guess. There was no one here at all.”

Ian stared at her averted face and saw that the color had risen in her cheeks. He stood hesitating, not knowing what to say or do. She was lying. There had certainly been a man in the store. What motive could she have for lying about it? Thoughts rushed upon him like a dark flight of evil wings, beating against his mind. Was this an old lover of Is'bel's? Was he perhaps someone out of her past who had some hold upon her? Who was he and where did he come from? What was his business in the store?

He went away to hang up his hat and when he came back Is'bel had gone to prepare the supper.

He opened some letters, filed some bills, his mind always busy with the perplexity of Is'bel's lie. He couldn't make it out; he didn't know what to think or how to act.

“Supper’s ready,” she called to him and he dropped the letters which he was making a mere pretense at reading and rose with a sigh. “I’ve laid the table beside the fire in your study. It seems sort of damp and chilly to-night. I thought it would be kind of nice to have it down here.”

She had lighted the candles in a tall, black, iron candelabrum, and the little book-lined room glimmered in the dancing lights. Ian stood on the threshold for a moment looking at the model of a ship over the mantelpiece which his father had made in his spare time. In the shadows over the fireplace he thought it was like a ghostly ship with sails set drifting into the further shadows of the unknown. An occasional gleam from the fire lit the sails like the reflection of a dying sun. He, too, felt himself to be sailing towards unknown waters, drifting into the shadows that were dark and impenetrable.

“Doesn’t it all look pretty?” Is’bel cried gleefully, straightening a crease in the white cloth which covered the small, round table she had drawn up before the fire. “The candles make it seem like a party.”

Ian wondered at her gay spirits. She did not even appear to be conscious that she had lied to him. He sat down heavily at the table and as he listened to her cheerful tones he became more and more sunk in a dark depression. Was it of such small concern to her then that she had tried to deceive him? Why, he might believe anything of her—he might believe—

He drew himself up sharply and tried to rivet his attention upon what she was saying. He noticed that she had taken extra pains with the supper to-night. There was delicious fried sole, with slices of lemon and sprigs of parsley; fluffy tea biscuits; preserved apricots swimming in golden syrup in a fluted amber dish; a tall chocolate cake decorated with nuts. Is’bel loved to cook, and he always praised her for her proficiency, but to-night he had such a leaden weight upon his heart that he scarcely made even a pretence at eating.

“Isn’t it what you want?” Is’bel inquired in distressed tones as Ian laid down his knife and fork and sat staring moodily into the fire.

“Why yes, of course,” he said rousing himself, “everything’s delicious.”

He was glad when she began to clear it away and he could return to the comfort of his pipe. The tobacco cleared his brain and helped him to think. He wouldn’t ask her again who had been in the store. He wouldn’t force another lie to her lips. He remembered as he sat looking into the dancing, golden flames what she had confessed to him once—“it’s just as though someone was whispering to me all the time, telling me to lie, telling me to steal, telling me to do anything that’s dirty and mean”—and he had promised her then that they would fight it out together. They weren’t through the jungle yet; it would be

foolish to imagine they were. He wouldn't help her by standing aloof and being coldly critical of her conduct.

As he watched her passing in and out of the room there was such an ache in his heart that it seemed to ache through every muscle in his body. Why must the evil and the fine be so inextricably mixed? Is'bel, who had come like sunlight into his life, Is'bel, so sweet, so generous, so dear—with a lie on her lips, and who knew what depths of darkness hidden away in her heart. Pitiful things, human beings—pitiful.

He was afraid to speak to her again lest he should drive her quite away from him. When she came to him at last, after having straightened the room, and laid her hot cheek against his, he drew her closer with hands that trembled.

“Is'bel—little Is'bel,” he murmured helplessly.

And over the fireplace, in the shadows, the little ship with set sails drifted out into the unknown.

He was obliged to go to the bank the following morning and he was averse to leaving Is'bel alone in the store. He didn't want to think that that man might be dropping in again while he was away. He suggested that she should go uptown to do some shopping, but she appeared to be disinclined to do so.

“What's the good of spending money when I have everything I want?”

He saw that she was unwilling to go and his mind immediately seized on the idea that she had reason for not leaving the store that morning.

“Then perhaps you wouldn't mind doing some messages for me,” he said, hurriedly trying to invent some immediate needs. A dark fit of depression took hold of him. Was it always to be like this? Wasn't he ever going to be able to leave the store without fearing what would take place in his absence? Life would be impossible if that were to be the case.

“I don't think I want anything very urgently after all,” he said, slowly turning away.

Immediately her two arms were around his neck.

“'Course I'd like to go shopping. I don't know why I didn't want to go when you first spoke of it. Just laziness, I guess.”

She went out shortly afterwards and Ian was just preparing to leave the store when a shadow darkened the doorway. He turned, expecting to find a

customer entering, but no one came in. He went curiously to the door and looked out. He was certain that someone had come right up to the door and looked in, and seeing him, had gone away.

He opened the door and went outside, looking up and down the street. He was turning back into the store when he caught sight of a small figure wearing a gray cap disappearing into the lane opposite.

It was the same man undoubtedly. Ian's first impulse was to run after him and demand what it was he wanted. Yet he could scarcely do that. The man had a perfect right to look in the store. It was quite clear that he must have been looking for Is'bel. Perhaps Is'bel had expected this visit and that was why she had been so reluctant to go uptown this morning.

Was he an old lover? In that event it wasn't a case for the police. It was his own affair to find out who this man was who was hanging around the bookstore. Was Is'bel afraid of this man? was she trying to shield him? She might even care for him; might already be regretting her impulsive marriage with himself.

Ravaged and tormented with these thoughts, Ian left the store and walked listlessly down the street. This worry seemed to be sapping all the energy from his mind and body. He felt sure that there was some danger threatening Is'bel; but danger of what he did not know.

Is'bel complained early that evening of feeling tired.

"It was so crowded in the stores," she said nervously, pushing back the heavy hair from her forehead. "I'm tired. I think I'll go to bed."

Ian followed her upstairs soon afterwards. He was tired himself. All day he felt as though he had been carrying around a weight which he could not shake off. He wanted to go to sleep and shut it all away.

It was just before midnight that he awakened from a restless sleep, wondering whether a dream had awakened him, or some unaccustomed sound. He sat up in bed, listening intently. Light streamed into the room from the street light at the corner, lying in a broad, silver band across the bed. Is'bel was lying on her side, her cheek pillowed on her hand. As he looked at her he saw her eyelashes flutter, then fall again.

"Is'bel. Are you awake?"

No answer. He could have sworn that she was as wide awake as he was himself. He looked towards the bedroom door, which was slightly ajar, and fancied that he saw a faint light flicker for an instant over the white

woodwork. He could hear the clock whirr before it struck then the slow, solemn strike. Twelve o'clock. The silence that engulfed the last strike seemed to Ian pregnant with terror.

It was absurd, he told himself, waking in the night like a terrified child. Perhaps a mouse had run across the floor; a shutter swung back; a board creaked. His nerves were in a bad way when he could start up from his sleep in such a state over nothing at all. He would go downstairs and have a look around to see that everything was all right, otherwise he would lie here listening for imaginary sounds half the night.

In the light from the street he found his clothes, slipped on his trousers, thrust his arms into the sleeves of a coat, then hesitated over his bedroom slippers. If there was anyone in the store they would hear him on the stairs unless he went noiselessly. He crept across the room to the cupboard and found a pair of running shoes and slipped them on his feet.

“Ian.”

It was just the breath of a whisper from the bed.

“Ian.”

“It’s all right. Don’t be frightened. I’m just going downstairs for a minute.”

“You mustn’t. Oh, you mustn’t.”

“I’ll be back in no time.”

“You mustn’t go. Ian—you mustn’t go.”



“Ian!” It was a whisper from the bed. “It’s all right,” he murmured, “I’m just going downstairs for a minute.”

She was sitting up in bed, her eyes wide open, staring at him in evident alarm. It was no use standing here arguing with her. Ian moved past the door and drew it closed behind him, then crept slowly to the top of the stairs and cautiously began to descend.

The door into the shop was open. As he stood on the threshold a flicker of light from the front of the store startled him. So, it hadn’t been just fancy after all. There was someone in the store. But what would anyone be doing over there by the window? There was nothing there but books and magazines. The till was further back, but it was empty. There weren’t even any books of value in the store at present. No one would be fool enough to steal books. If it had been a month ago when he had that first edition of Boccaccio he wouldn’t have been so surprised. But that had been sold some time ago.

As Ian's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he could make out a small figure wearing a cap. It was the same man; there was no doubt of that. But what could he want? He appeared to be searching for something quickly and quietly, drawing the books out of the shelves and putting them back again.

Ian stood puzzled, watching the tiny, round eye of the flashlight the man was holding in his left hand. The man wasn't there to steal money; he couldn't be such a fool as to steal books. Had Is'bel left something there for him? That appeared to be the only solution to the problem.

Suspicion and jealousy beat upon him in strong waves. Rage was like a rocket exploding inside of him. He stole slowly forward, stealthy and noiseless as a cat, all the time keeping his attention fixed on that small, busy figure over near the bookshelves. He had no conception of what he intended to do; he had no revolver, no weapon of any sort.

As Ian came opposite he saw the man draw something out from behind the last handful of books and turn swiftly towards the door. Ian sprang, his body like an uncoiling spring. A vase fell with a terrific shattering of pottery; a pile of books tumbled to the floor.

The man was like a shadow slipping between Ian's hands. The door swung back and the sharp crack of an automatic shook the air. A warmth ran down Ian's hand, numbing the fingers. He clung for a moment to the partly opened door while the silence of the street was broken by the sound of quickly running feet.

With a great effort Ian pulled himself together, a hard rage tearing at him. He had never felt such strong passions rising in him before. It was like something primitive, coming up from the profoundest depths of his being. It was mixed up with his love for Is'bel, savagery that was made up of jealousy and suspicion and a desire to protect where he loved. It poured a new strength into him, it fixed his determination to follow this thing through and find out the truth.

Starting after the man, he was just in time to see his shadow disappear into a lane near the upper end of the street. He realized that this man must know the neighborhood better than he himself knew it. But he had no intention of allowing him to escape.

His light running shoes beat a thin staccato on the pavement as he ran at top speed towards the mouth of the lane. He was able to catch a glimpse of a flying figure between himself and a light far down the alley.

The lane opened into a mean street, one of those tributary streams whose wandering course finally emptied into the very heart of the slums. An instinct

told him to turn to the right, and as he rounded a turn in the street he could make out the flying figure ahead.

A black shape leaped out at him on his left. He dodged, just in time to escape a blow dealt from an open doorway. He stumbled and slid, face down on the filthy pavement. The echo of a laugh wavered through the stillness as he gathered himself up and sped forward again. It was safer to keep to the middle of the road. He was in a neighborhood which was more friendly to the pursued than to the pursuer.

At moments his own sanity mocked him. Why this mad run through unknown streets, into the very heart of terror? Why not return to his warm bed, the security of locked doors, the shelter of his own surroundings? But he knew that it was not only this man in the gray cap whom he was hunting down. It was all the rest of the jungle folk—he would show them that Is'bel was not to be drawn back into their ways; he would teach them that they must leave her alone; that she belonged to them no more.

A hot writhing tongue of flame leapt up in the darkness of a lane ahead. Something whined over Ian's shoulder and simultaneously a thud sounded behind him. The bullet had sunk harmlessly into a tree or fence. Would the next bullet go home as harmlessly? Sweat broke out in cold drops on his forehead; his lips were dry and parched. But the madness of the pursuit still possessed him, regardless of this new danger.

Again came the warning flash, the whine, the thud. Ian plunged towards a doorway that was suddenly lit by the flash.

He was in a small backyard. A door opened ahead of him, letting out a stream of light and a confused clamor of voices. He pushed the door further open and stepped inside.

A long bar ran lengthwise on his left. A few nondescript-looking men were lined up against it, and they turned to stare at him as he stood in the doorway, his eyes blinded after the darkness of the streets. A curious silence spread over the room. The bartender's small eyes were insolent and staring as he continued to pour some liquid from a thick-necked bottle into a glass.

Ian looked along the line of men sprawling at the bar and then searched the small tables that were scattered about the room. There was no sign of the man in the gray cap. Then, in that curious silence, he heard the sound of a man taking long, painful breaths as though he had been running. He looked around again and this time noticed a small figure crouched over one end of the bar,

his shoulders rising and falling. Ian sprang forward, indifferent to everything except that small figure in the gray cap.

Instantly the room broke into confusion. The bartender shouted some remark to the man in the gray cap. Ian saw a door at the end of the room open, and then everything went spinning before him in black circles. Dizzily he knew by an exploding crash behind him that someone had flung a bottle at his head. It had grazed his temple before it struck the wall, falling in splinters of broken glass.

Blindly he made his way towards the door through which the man in the gray cap had gone. It would be wise to escape as quickly as possible from this unfriendly room. The door swung easily open beneath his hand and slammed behind him. He found himself on the threshold of a small room lit by a lamp. He leaned back against the door through which he had come, breathing heavily and painfully from exhaustion. Very faintly came the muffled sounds of shouting and confusion from the room he had left.

“Well, what’s your trouble?”

Ian blinked rapidly. He had thought the room was empty. Now he saw a huge, bloated figure sitting at a desk in one corner, his chair tipped back against the wall, a thick cigar sticking aggressively out of the corner of his mouth. Ian recognized the figure instantly. He had seen photographs of the man too often not to know him at once for the notorious Boss Tucker, the leader of the Riverside district.

He stood staring at Tucker, while the man watched him, through half-closed eyes, slowly twisting his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other. There was something ominous and horrible in that enormous, bloated figure, something that silenced him, making words seem futile and ineffectual. It slowly dawned upon him that he must be in that notorious hotel on the river of which Tucker had been the proprietor before he had made himself prominent in politics.

“Were you born dumb?”

Ian moistened his lips. His throat felt dry and words wouldn’t come. He stared fascinated at the man, his eyes falling to the thick, red hand on the edge of the desk that looked so much like raw beef.

“I want to know—where the man in the gray cap went,” Ian stammered, feeling foolish before that insolent stare. “He came in here. A small man in a gray cap. I want to know what he was doing in my store just now.”

Tucker removed the cigar from his mouth and languidly contemplated the ash before flicking it off with a thick finger. Then he abruptly jerked his

thumb over his shoulder in the direction of a door half concealed by a dingy, red curtain.

“He’s gone in there. If you get a move on you might catch him.”

Ian turned towards the door Tucker had indicated, perceiving the repulsive grin that spread over the man’s face. He wanted to get away as fast as possible from that gross animal. Tucker rose as Ian pulled at the handle of the door. There was no light beyond; cool, damp air flowed up into his face from what appeared to be a cellar. Ian could just make out the beginning of a steep flight of steps before the door behind him was suddenly slammed, precipitating him forward. He clutched wildly at the rail to keep himself from falling into that pit of darkness below. Tucker was apparently not averse to the idea of him breaking his neck.

The railing just saved him from falling. He reached the bottom of the steps and searched in his pockets for a match. By the fitful, flickering light he could make out the vague outlines of packing boxes, piled high on all sides with a narrow passage way between which led on to further darkness beyond. These cases probably contained contraband of all sorts; goods smuggled into the city by way of the river. Or again they might be stolen goods, fruits of robberies in the city. It struck him with sickening force that it was not likely that Tucker would let him come down here if there were any means of escape. Either there was no way out, or there was danger lurking for him just outside. His chase was leading him further than he had intended.

The match died out. He struck another, but it broke off short. His heart was pounding violently. He kept telling himself that he was not afraid. There were small sounds all around him in the darkness; footsteps overhead. At any instant Tucker might appear at the head of the steps, peering down to see what had become of him. With a great effort at control over his trembling hands he struck another match and started down the passage way between the tall crates. At length he found himself before a small door. He turned the handle and to his relief and surprise found that it was unlocked.

The fresh night air was like a plunge into cold water. It seemed to splash in his face and revive him. He stared around curiously and found that he was on a small landing place just above the level of the river. On both sides of him rose the slimy piles of a pier, while in front he could see the black shine of the river, almost turgid at this point.



With a quick spring Ian had both arms around the man's neck and they both came sprawling to the ground.

The flare of a match struck away to his left made him start and look in that direction. A small figure with a cap was seated with his back turned to Ian, smoking a cigarette. It was the man whom he had chased; the man he wanted. Ian crept noiselessly forward along the water-logged planks and with a quick spring had both arms around the man's neck. They both came sprawling to the ground.

Ian clapped his hand over the man's mouth to prevent any outcry.

"You're the man I want. What the devil were you doing in my store?"

His muscles tightened as he strove to hold the struggling figure down.

The man jerked his head violently to one side to escape the smothering hand on his mouth.

"Let go, you! Let go."

"What were you doing in my store? You'll tell me first why you were hanging around there before I let you go."

"You poor fool. You better get out of this while the going's good. I don't know why the devil Tucker let you through. You haven't got the chance of a snowball unless you go quick. I'm telling you this for Is'bel's sake. She's not mixed up in this."

Ian released his hold. The man's tones were sincere. If Is'bel were not mixed up in some affair with this man, then he had no more concern with him.

By the light of a lantern hanging on the pier he could see the man's face quite distinctly. He was scarcely more than a boy, with a weak, dissolute face.

“They're coming for me in the launch. For Is'bel's sake I'm going to show you a way out. You can sneak between those piles to the left, and there's a ladder to the top. Quick, I hear the boat coming.”

Ian heard the faint sound of a motor boat in the distance. The boy's agitation communicated itself to him. There was nothing to be gained by staying until the launch appeared. He slipped between the piles and found the ladder. In a moment he had swung himself to the top. He was in a narrow lane beside the hotel. He passed along it and soon found himself in a maze of crooked streets.

His head reeled with the experiences of the last hour. He was still no nearer an understanding of what it all meant. He had no idea of what had brought the boy to the store. He had spoken of Is'bel. It was clear then that he knew her. Is'bel could not be quite innocent of some conspiracy.

He cursed himself for not having made the boy divulge what it was all about. He had accomplished nothing. He felt foolish and ineffectual. He hailed a passing taxi and climbed in, for his legs seemed as though they were giving way beneath him, and his arm was growing stiff from the bullet wound in his hand. He gave the address of a doctor in his neighborhood, realizing in his utter weariness that he had better have it attended to at once.

Leaning back in one corner of the taxi little stabs of thought pierced his weary brain. He had been a fool not to have forced the truth from the boy. He felt sick and disgusted at his failure to accomplish anything. The jungle had defeated him.

At length he arrived back at the bookstore, his hand bandaged and feeling slightly revived. The store was in darkness, but as he opened the door he saw that there was a light in his study. As he walked soundlessly in his light shoes he trod on something sharp, and stooping picked up something that glittered in the semi-darkness. It was a jewelled pendant.

Understanding flashed upon him, like a blaze of clear light. The jewel robbery. One of the thieves had hidden the jewel in the store. He had come to ask Is'bel to help him. To-night he had come to get the jewels. It was as clear as though it were written in flaming letters on the darkness before him. Why hadn't he thought of it before?

Is'bel was crouched in his large leather chair, her head buried on her arms. As Ian stood for an instant on the threshold she threw up her head. Her eyes

were like a startled deer's in her panic-white face.

A little moan escaped from her white lips.

“I thought . . . you were killed.”

For a moment he thought she was going to faint. Then color came slowly into her cheeks. Her eyes fell on his bandaged hand and again fear leaped into her eyes.

“It's nothing,” he said, “only a scratch.”

“I suppose you know all about it. I should never have let Jake put the jewels in the store. He offered me a pendant and I thought it was kind of pretty. I never knew how wrong I had done until I saw you going down stairs. You'd best let me go back to where I belong.”

She looked at him with eyes filled with such pain that he felt suffocated with pity. He sat down on the arm of her chair and took her cold hands between his own.

“It was the jungle folk, dear, coming out of the jungle with their wiles to try and draw you back into it again. But they haven't got you—and they won't get you, for you're mine . . . just mine.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Tentacles of Evil* by Beatrice Redpath]