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The SACRED JARS

by

OSCAR COOK



"Her words were drowned in a great shout of fear as a lighted torch fell from its bamboo socket onto the palm-roofed house."

DENNIS, district officer of the Labuk district in British North Borneo, had been spending a few days "local leave" on Tingling Estate, for Walkely, the manager, and he were great friends. The night before his departure the two men had sat together in the latter's mosquito room, fitted up like a "den," and with pipes well lit had roamed in desultory manner over many fields of conversation.

For the last ten minutes or so there had been silence between them—the silence of friends in complete accord. Dennis broke it.

"Throw me a match, Walley," he said.

Walkely moved as though to comply, then stopped as his "boy" entered, carrying a tray containing whisky and soda, which he placed on a table near his master. He was about to depart when Walkely spoke.

"The *Tuan* is leaving tomorrow be-

fore breakfast, Amat. Tell Cookie to make some sandwiches and see the Thermos flask is filled with hot tea."

"*Tuan.*"

"And hand these to the *Tuan.*" Walkely pointed to the matches.

Amat obeyed and went out.

Walkely rose from his long chair, mixed the drinks and held out a glass to Dennis.

"To our next meeting," he said, and raised his glass.

Dennis followed suit.

Then, yawning, Dennis rose, and stretching his arms well above his head, looked sleepily in the direction of his bedroom.

Walkely nodded assent and held open the mosquito door.

A few minutes later the house was in darkness, save for the lights that shone through the open windows of the two bedrooms.

The rooms were on either side of a large dining room, which in turn

opened out from the main veranda, off one side of which was built the mosquito room. At the far end of the dining room were two folding doors that led to a passage and pantry, and thence down some steps to the kitchen and "boys'" quarters at the rear of the house.

As Dennis undressed he sleepily hummed the latest fox-trot record received from England. Then dimming the light he got into bed.

From where he lay he could hear Walkely moving about his room, and could see the reflection his light cast on the exposed *attap* (dried sago leaves) roof of the house. As he idly watched, speculating dreamily on Walley's success as a manager, Walkely's lamp in turn was lowered. Followed the creaking noise of a body turning on a spring mattress—then silence.

Dennis rolled from his left to right side preparatory to sleep.

"Nighty-night, Old Thing," he grunted.

"Night," came back the sleepy reply.

Then all was quiet save for the gentle rustling of the rubber trees and the occasional hoot of an owl.

Presently Dennis awoke to full alertness. He was not strung up; no sound nor fear nor nightmare had aroused him. He was simply and quietly awake. Turning on his side he looked at his watch. The hands pointed to 2 a. m. He closed his eyes, but sleep would not be wooed.

For a long time Dennis lay in the nearly darkened room, watching the waving branch of a rubber tree outside the window, that moved gently to the sighing of the breeze.

Suddenly he heard the sound of feet ascending the steps that led from garden to veranda doors.

But half awake, he listened.

SLOWLY the footsteps mounted the stairs; then came the lifting of the latch that fastened the low wooden gates, and the creaking of moving hinges. The footsteps entered, continued the full length of the veranda, to pass into the dining room beyond. Here for a moment they halted. Then they moved again, shuffling uncertainly—forward, backward, sideways—as those of a person trying to locate something in the dark.

Again they moved with steady tread and reached the intervening doors that shut off the passage.

Dennis listened and waited. What the devil was old Walley doing, he sleepily wondered.

A sudden rush of cool air struck on him over the top of the bedroom wall, billowing out his mosquito net.

Creak—creak—creak—the doors were opening. The footsteps went along the passage and came to a standstill at the end.

"Boy."

The call was clear and decisive, but Dennis failed to quite recognize the voice, though he realized it was an European's.

There came no answer.

"Boy!"

This time the call was sharper, and impatience was in its tone. Still no reply.

In the silence Dennis, wondering greatly, waited, for he was still uncertain whether the voice was Walkely's or another's.

The footsteps sounded again as they descended the stairs that led to the servants' quarters. On the bottom step they halted.

"Boy!"

The call was long, loud and angry. Yet still no answer came.

Up the stairs the footsteps returned. They strode along the passage, paused as the doors were closed and the latch clicked, then swiftly moved through the dining room out

on to the wide veranda. Here for a moment they rested.

Sounded the fumbling for a latch, the squeak of a faulty hinge, and from the sharp banging of a door Dennis knew the footsteps had entered the mosquito room.

He sprang out of bed, and sitting on its edge hurriedly pushed his feet into slippers. Then, as he was about to move, the lamp in the room went out.

"Damn!" he muttered, and fumbled for his matches, but before he found them he was listening to the opening and shutting of drawers.

He struck a match, and by its light crossed to the lamp, the wick of which, however, refused to burn, though he wasted many matches upon it.

In the gathering darkness, for the moon was setting, he moved toward the door, but with his hand upon the knob stood still, for the footsteps were shuffling again and the sharp banging to of the mosquito door made him jump.

Through the veranda the footsteps went, gaining sureness with every stride. The gates creaked and the latch fell to. Down the stairs the footsteps clumped, the sound growing fainter till it became lost in the night.

Three deep-toned notes from the office gong boomed on the air. Dennis shivered, kicked off his slippers and returned to bed. The air was cold, so he drew his blanket well around him.

"Old Walley's walking in his sleep or else indulging in a midnight prowl," he muttered. Half a minute later he was sound asleep.

AS DENNIS' eyes opened to the beauties of a tropic dawn, the clink of silver spoons against china reached his ears and the scent of a cigarette crept into the room.

He plunged his head into a basin

of cold water, brushed his hair, and still in his *sarong* and *kabaiah* (sleeping garments) went out on to the veranda where Walkely paused in the act of conveying a cup to his mouth.

"Morning, Dennis," he grunted and continued drinking his tea.

He was never very talkative the first thing in the morning.

Dennis answered and busied himself with the teapot. Then, under cover of meticulously choosing a piece of toast, he studied Walkely, who showed no signs of having spent a sleepless night.

Suddenly Walkely looked up and caught Dennis' eye upon him.

"Well?" he asked; "what is it?"

"Nothing," Dennis curtly replied.

"Then why look at me like that?"

"Sorry, Old Thing," Dennis stammered. "I was only wondering——"

"Yes?"

"What the devil were you up to last night?—walking all over the house and shouting for your boy."

"Then you heard it too?" Walkely asked the question with relief.

"It? What's it?" Dennis retorted. "Didn't I hear *you* come up the veranda steps, open the gates and walk to the back? You called 'Boy' three times but got no answer. Then you walked back through the house and down the steps. What was wrong, Walley?"

Walkely looked Dennis full in the eyes as he slowly answered.

"Nothing! Nothing was wrong and I never moved from my room till this morning."

"But—then who the——?"

"I never moved," Walkely repeated. "What you heard was Glistler."

"Glistler! What on earth do you mean? Who's Glistler?"

"You know. The chap who was manager here before Bellamy. He shot himself. Died in your room—on your bed. He's buried in the garden at the foot of the hill below your

window. Great pity but—drink and a native woman—nice chap too.”

Walkely ceased as the light of recollection shone on Dennis’ face.

“Yes, I remember,” he spoke almost to himself. “I met him once at a Jesselton Race Meeting. A tall, good-looking fellow?”

Walkely nodded and Dennis continued.

“He was awfully keen on a beautiful native woman—a Dusun named Jebec.”

“Yes. She was lured away from Glistar by another man. It was a dirty thing to do.”

“The swine! I only hope——”

“You needn’t worry,” Walkely interrupted. “He rues the day all right, I’ll bet, for she’s got him body and soul—doped to the eyes—and her temper is that of a fiend incarnate. She is priestess, too, of the *Gusi*, and he daren’t call his soul his own.”

“So poor old Glistar’s loss was really his gain, if only he’d known!” Dennis’ words were gently spoken.

“Yes. But he felt her absence, and in the loneliness that followed, the drink got him again.”

For nearly a minute there was silence between the two. It was as if their memories had recalled Glistar’s spirit to his old home, almost as if he were sitting at the table with them, while the tinkling of Jebec’s anklets sounded from an adjoining room. . . .

Dennis broke the silence.

“And you mean that—that was he, last night?” he asked.

“Yes.” The word seemed drawn reluctantly from Walkely’s lips.

“But, good Lord, man!—you don’t mean?—you can’t—it’s preposterous.”

“I know.” Walkely spoke slowly. “It sounds absurd, doesn’t it? But Old Bellamy went through it, saw him and spoke to him and once even shot at him.”

“Bellamy! Bellamy shot him?”

“Yes. And there isn’t much mysticism about him—he’s as much imagination as a turnip.”

“But——”

“All the ‘buts’ in the world won’t alter matters. Bellamy’s seen him. I’ve seen him, and you’ve heard him. He’s there—and it happens, and it’s always the same—only——”

“What?” The word was wrung from Dennis.

“He’s never entered the mosquito room before.”

“You think——?”

“I don’t know! How can I? I’m only wondering why he went there—what he was searching for.”

“Drink, perhaps?”

Walkely shook his head.

“No,” he said. “The room wasn’t built in his days. No; there’s something worrying him, something that’s caused this variation of his usual walk.”

His eyes met Dennis’s and he gave a short, half-ashamed laugh. Then:

“Get on with your tea. When you’ve finished we’ll go and look at his grave. I always inspect it twice a month and put a coolie on cleaning it up and looking after the flowers. We’ll have a look today.”

AS DENNIS dressed with unusual slowness, his mind was full of the tragedy so strangely recalled. “Poor old Glistar!” he muttered. “What an end!”

An impatient call roused Dennis from his reverie and he hastened to the veranda, to find Walkely already on the garden steps conversing with Gaga, the head *mandor* (overseer) of many years’ standing.

The three at once set off. Down well-laid cement steps, along a broad path that wound among a profusion of bright-colored flowers they went. Overhead a flaming sun rode in an azure sky, and a faint breeze fanned their faces with its cooling breath, perfumed with the scent of dew and

the fragrant, elusive blossoms of the rubber trees.

At the foot of the hill they turned and went in single file along a narrow path that followed the winding contour of the hill.

The three walked in silence, for speech was difficult along that narrow track. Suddenly the path, dipping down, turned sharply, and Walkely, who was leading, became for an instant lost to view. Dennis, humming a Dusun love song, followed close behind, but as he reached the turn the tune died abruptly on his lips and he stood stone-still.

"Good Lord! What can it mean?"

The words were gasped by Walkely, who stood transfixed, staring with horror-struck eyes straight before him.

Instinctively Walkely turned to Dennis, who, like himself, stood with gaze fixed and staring eyes.

"What can it mean?" he gasped a second time.

For they had reached the grave, and it was open. Heaped under the railings surrounding it, which were intact, were piles of fresh-dug earth, and all round lay the scattered flowers, withered and trampled into twisted shapes.

The eyes of Dennis and Walkely met. In each there lurked a question that neither dared to ask. Each heard again the shuffling footsteps of the previous night, and the opening and shutting of the drawers in the mosquito room.

A shadow fell across them as they stood. There came a startled cry, the quick pattering of bare feet, and Gaga flung himself upon his knees, burying his hands in the earth.

"Gaga!"

The word was a sharp command of outraged wrath. But the man did not heed, and his hands continued fumbling, fingering, searching.

Walkely stooped down to seize the kneeling *mandor* by the shoulder,

then straightened up as the latter rose and turning, showed a face, pallid under the yellow of his skin, from which stark horror shone.

"The *pandang* (buckle). Tuan," he gasped. "The *pandang*! It has gone!"

Walkely looked at him in stupefaction.

"Gaga," he began, but got no further, for the man, heedless of Walkely's upraised hand, broke in:

"The *pandang*, Tuan, the silver *pandang*, the Jebee used to wear as token of her priesthood of the *Gusi*, has gone. The silver *pandang* is no more!"

He ceased, and for a moment there was silence among the three.

On Walkely's face there showed a blank amazement, but Dennis' brows had gathered in a frown and his lips had closed in a deep, straight line. He was the first to speak.

"Walley," he said, "may I ask Gaga questions?"

Walkely nodded his assent, and Dennis turned to Gaga.

"Gaga, tell me, what makes you say the silver *pandang* is no more?"

"Because," Gaga stammered in his emotion, "because—when Tuan Glistar was buried, the *pandang* was buried too—and—now——"

His gaze sought for the coffin for a moment and he fingered a charm of monkey's teeth that hung around his neck.

"Tell me, Gaga," Dennis' voice was very gentle, "all you know. Begin at the beginning."

GAGA looked relieved, for a native resents questioning and loves to tell a story his own way.

"The *Tuans* know," he began, "that Tuan Glistar had a *nyai* (a native housekeeper) named Jebee. She came to him when she was very young, but vowed by the oaths of her parents to the priesthood of the *Gusi*, the sacred jars we Dusans worship,

which only our womenkind may tend. But she was young and beautiful and full of life. Her beauty was unmatched in all this land of Sabah (Borneo); her form was lithe, her footsteps light; her waist was small; yet she was vowed in wifehood to a jar, the sacred *Gusi!* Her lips and eyes, though warring with her blood, were innocent of love, till Tuan Glister visited the village in search of coolies for the Estate.

"Then"—Gaga paused, seeming for a moment at a loss to find his words—"then—the *Tuan* was tall and handsome, and possessed golden hair. He had a laughing, winning way and eyes that darted here and there and made the warm blood race within your veins when once his glance had rested on you. His eyes discovered Jebbe, and——"

Gaga looked nervously from Dennis and Walkely as he shuffled his feet, frightened of saying too much concerning a white man before others of his race.

Dennis read the meaning of his glance.

"Yes, Gaga. You may speak," he said, "for the *Tuan Besar* (manager) and I are friends and we would give Tuan Glister's wandering spirit peace. Say all that is in your heart. We understand."

"*Tuan!*" Gaga's tone conveyed a depth of grateful meaning. "That night there was dancing and feasting in the village, and pitcher after pitcher of *tapai* (fermented liquor) was consumed. The *Tuan* drank too, but none could stand against him, and one by one they sank into a heavy sleep. Only the *Tuan* remained. He left the headman's house, and going through the village reached Jebbe's home.

"It was that darkest hour before dawn when the chill wind blows, yet she was seated on the topmost step. The light of the dying moon seemed focused on the silver buckle that she

wore, hung from a rotan girdle round her waist.

"Their eyes met. No word was said. The *Tuan* stretched out his arms and Jebbe went to him, and the *Tuan's* arms enfolded her."

Gaga ceased. The silence lengthened till the office gong, booming eight deep notes, shattered the spell.

"How do you know all this, Gaga?" Walkely asked at length. "You never mentioned it before!"

A look of surprize flitted over the *mandor's* face, then he quietly replied:

"The *Tuan* never asked me my story before, nor is it customary for the white man to discuss others of his race with natives. How do I know? Why, *Tuan Besar*, was I not present on that night, and is not Jebbe my sister, though of a different mother?"

"The *Tuan* had saved my life, and Jebbe was young. The warm blood danced in her veins, and her heart cried out for a mate. And so—— The river, *Tuan*, flowed far from the the village. The *Tuan's* boat was there. All in the village slept. The *Tuan* led her to the boat, while I stole up the steps, entered the house and made a bundle of her clothes. Then to the waiting boat I followed. The *Tuan* had covered Jebbe with his coat and she was sleeping, but the silver buckle hung round his neck. And from that day it never left him. We three were alone in the boat. The *Tuan* and I picked up the paddles, and as their blades in silence touched the water the moon slipped beneath the earth and the *Burong hantu* (owl) hooted thrice. An evil omen, which the *Tuan* heeded not and Jebbe did not hear.

"Till the sun was high we paddled and by noon were far beyond pursuit, for the river flowed very swiftly and one does not wake early from such a sleep as those in the village were sleeping."

Gaga paused, then he added.

"The rest of the story the *Tuans* know. For a little while the *Tuan* and Jebec were happy. But the omen of the *Burong hantu* and the dying moon would not be denied.

"And the shadow of the *Gusi* lay between them. So though the *Tuan* loved her he drank too deeply, and she found favor in another's sight and went away. But the *Tuans* know the rest. I buried him—there was no white man on the Estate—and as he died, he made me promise to bury the buckle with him, hanging round his neck. It was the only thing of Jebec's that he kept."

"And now?"

Dennis put the question sharply and his eyes held Gaga's gaze.

"I am afraid, *Tuan*—sore afraid."

"Of what?"

"I do not know; and the silver *pandang* has been stolen, though its hiding place was unknown. To none has it value, save to my people, and for years now they have let it rest. But, *Tuan*, they never forget, and the *Gusi* is most sacred. In the great blue jar that Jebec used to tend, and should have wedded, Mabago, the bad Spirit, dwells. Of late evil has befallen my people: the buffalos bring forth no young, and the crops refuse to ripen; so, *Tuan*, I am afraid."

GAGA ceased, and once again a silence fell upon the three.

Suddenly it was broken by the hurrying footsteps and labored breathing of a man who ran, and round the bend appeared an *opas*.

All three looked up at his approach and saw stark fear upon his face.

"*Tuan! Tuan!*" he gasped. "*Tuan* Glisten can not be found. His house is empty, and his bedroom disarranged, and on the floor is a pool of blood—"

His eyes caught sight of the open grave. The words faltered on his

tongue, then ceased, and he stood silent, trembling like a leaf.

At the mention of that name Dennis started, but before he could speak Walkely answered the question hovering on his lips.

"Young Glisten's my new assistant, Dennis," he spoke in a queer, strained voice; "he came only last month; you haven't met him yet."

"But——"

"He's a younger brother of——" Walkely looked toward the grave. "It's horrible!" he muttered.

In a flash the meaning of the rifled grave and Glisten's disappearance grew plain, and the frown on Dennis' face grew deeper and his lips grew more compressed. Heedless of Walkely's questionings of the jibbering *opas* she turned to Gaga.

"Gaga," he said, "I see the hand of Maboga stretching out, seeking revenge for the insult of years ago. His arm is long. It stretches from the *Tuan's* grave to a village in the hills. Is it not so?"

"*Tuan?*" Gaga answered.

"It stretches," Dennis continued, "from the village to the new *Tuan's* house as well, for what the white man took must be repaid with interest. What think you, Gaga?"

"That the *Tuan* is wise and reads the *Dusun* as a book."

"Dennis!" Walkely had dismissed the *opas*, and putting out his hand grasped Dennis' arm. "Dennis," he cried, "what do you mean? Glisten has disappeared, there's blood upon his floor and we stand here, while heaven knows what devil's work is being done! What do you mean—with interest?"

"Listen, Walley," Dennis weighed his words and spoke with slow conviction. "I'm in the dark almost as much as you—but I know the *Dusuns* and the fetish of their *Gusi* worship. When Glisten took Jebec from her people, she broke their vows and outraged the sacred jars;

but while the years were plentiful and their calves were strong they did not worry; when, as now, the inevitable lean year comes they seek a reason for their troubles."

"You mean——?" asked Walkely, still perplexed.

"That reason is Maboga. They think he will not be appeased unless——"

Dennis did not finish, but his glance wandered to the open grave and back to Walkely's strained white face, on which the dawning light of comprehension showed.

"Good heavens!" he muttered; "you really think?"

Dennis nodded; then turned to Gaga.

"Gaga," he said, "tell me exactly what happens at the Feast."

"The silver buckles of the priestesses, *Tuan*, are hung upon the *Gusi's* lips. Then when the dying moon is half-way set, the mateless wives say prayers and wash the sacred jars, and call upon the spirits to come forth and give their judgment on the village for the year. This year I think Maboga's jar will once again be decked. But who will cleanse the sacred lips I can not think, for while Jebec lives the *pandang* may be worn by no one else. Tuan Glistler dared, and paid the price."

"And Maboga?" Dennis' voice was low, almost a whisper.

For a moment Gaga hesitated, then he replied: "The *Tuan*, himself, has said: 'What the white man took must be repaid—with interest'."

He paused; then he added: "A white man's head has never yet hung in a Dusun house, but three days hence Maboga will decide."

The eyes of Dennis and Walkely met. Both seemed to hear again the shufflings in the night, the opening and the shutting of the drawers. Both understood the object of that search.

"I'll borrow Glistler's revolver, Walley, for we'll go alone with only Gaga as our guide, and attend this Feast," said Dennis.

FOR hours the booming of gongs had been borne upon the breeze, yet though the three had been steadily ascending, the deep-toned notes still sounded far away.

On the crest of a hill Dennis and his companions halted for a brief rest, and then onward and upward the trio climbed, while the track grew narrower and stonier and the jungle pressed closer on every side, and long trailing thorn-edged creepers, hanging from the trees, whipped their faces and tore their clothes.

The leading beast stopped and Gaga raised his hand. Without a word the two white men drew level, for the path had widened out and they stood upon the border of a glade, dissected by a muddy stream, whose banks were scored with a myriad hoof-marks.

Gaga slipped from his animal and softly spoke.

"We are nearly there, *Tuan*. This is their grazing ground, but all the animals are at the village, for all have ridden to the Feast."

Dennis nodded and proceeded like the others to tether his beast.

Then on foot the three moved forward, but with a quicker pace, for the gongs were loudly booming with a beat that would not be denied. Even as they crossed the muddy stream, the swaying rhythmic time, rising and falling with the cadence of a dance, gave place to an insistent note that rose and rose, till only one intense vibration, one single throbbing note, beat on the heavy air with a malignant strength, sapping all kindly thoughts and fanning to flame the primal lusts of hate and vengeance.

A little farther and the path rose with a sudden precipitousness that

forced them to mount the well-worn stones as though they climbed a stair. They reached the top, to stand upon a tiny plain, on which the shadows of the encircling trees were slowly lengthening.

Even as they rested to regain their breath that one insistent note ceased, and for an instant silence reigned.

Then from the glade's farther end arose a cry, faint at first, then slowly louder, harsher, stronger, swelling to a mighty *pæan*, to a tumultuous cry, "Maboga; Maboga! *Aki* (Father) Maboga!" And stillness once again, save for the hurried padding of running feet as the three raced across the shadow-flecked glade.

Panting, they reached a wall of jungle, pierced by a sunken path that twined its short length through the heart of a moss-clad hill, whose riven sides were lit with weird, fantastic lights, thrown from countless torches that burned upon a plateau at its end.

In the shadow of a belt of trees they paused to take stock of their surroundings.

The plateau formed a horseshoe, and at its apex stood a native house built eight feet off the ground, whose length stretched three hundred feet. At either end, leading to the only doors, were rough-hewn steps, carved from solid logs of timber, and from these steps arose two poles, six feet in height, between which was stretched a length of knotted rotan. From this, like a gruesome necklace, hung two rows of ghastly human heads—blackened and dried from the smoke of years—save at each end. And there hung two heads with staring sightless eyes, and bared lips exposing whitened teeth; and from them the red blood dripped.

Upon the ground, placed in a semi-circle, stood the jars — the sacred *Gusi* — ranged in accordance with their height and rank. From either end they tapered up toward the

central spot, where side by side rose two of flaming blue, that reached the height of a man's shoulder.

The rim, or lip, of each was of a different hue—one black, one white—while from the neck of those whose lip was black grew four large ears, and in the lobes of each was placed a human skull.

Behind each jar, save one, a woman stood; her thick black hair piled high upon her head, framing her lime-washed face from which her dark eyes shone; her figure swathed from chin to toe in shrouded black, girt at the waist with a girle of mice and monkey's teeth.

A silver *pandang* hung under the lip of every jar but one, and resting on its swelling shoulder shimmered and winked in the torches' fantastic light.

Facing the jars, the Dusuns sat in rows, immobile and intent. There shone upon the face of every one a strained expectancy, showing in the taut muscles of the back and the restless, twining fingers of the hands. Thus they waited—in that strange, uncanny silence—for the answer to their cry, "Maboga, Maboga, *Aki* Maboga!"

Almost forgetful of the purpose of their errand, Dennis and Walkely watched, fascinated by the scene before them, lit by the waning moon and the lurid flickering torches. Something of its primeval instincts and the tension of the squatting natives crept into their veins and held them spellbound as they gazed upon the colored jars, with their glittering shining buckles, each with its dumb attendant, white-faced woman, backed by the long, unbroken shadow of the palm-roofed house.

While the moon sank slowly in the west, until its lower rim began to kiss the topmost ridge of the roof, the silence lengthened, till it seemed as if nature slept and those rows of squat-

ting natives were graven images devoid of breath.

But all at once there came a creaking sound and the tension snapped. A long, rippling murmur, half sigh, half gasp, filled the air and Gaga's hand gripped Dennis' arm.

"Look, *Tuan*, look!" he whispered, and pointed to a hut which stood alone and almost hidden in the shade of a mighty billian tree.

The two men obeyed, following the line of Gaga's pointing finger.

The hut door opened slowly as the noise increased. But though no light burned within, a shadowy form was faintly visible moving toward the glade. Slowly, silently, though still half-hidden by the shade, the form drew near. Then as all eyes were turned upon it a glinting speck of light winked in the gloom. And as the figure moved the winking light moved too.

Slowly, steadily from the shade into the flickering fringe of torches; from the fringe into the full lurid glare moved the figure and the light.

A quick intake of many breaths; a long, loud gasp of terrified surprise. Then silence—and a woman, with a silver buckle hanging from a girdle round her waist, stood before the great blue sacred jar, from under whose deep black lip no silver buckle hung.

Over the silence, that like a living spirit lay upon the glade, Gaga's excited whisper just reached Dennis' and Walkely's ears.

"*Tuan*, it is Jeebe, and she wears the silver *pandang* that I buried in *Tuan* Glister's grave! *Tuan, Tuan*, I am afraid!"

Even as he spoke the woman raised her rounded arms, on which no gleaming bangles shone, and with a single gesture unloosed the coils of her high-wound hair. The long, thick tresses fell around her like a black cloak.

Again she raised her arms, this time in supplication, and her low, clear voice went chanting through the glade.

"*Aki* Maboga of the Sacred *Gusi*, Spirit of Evil who dwelleth in the great blue jar, hear now thy erring daughter, thy forsworn priestess, and forgive. Here in my shame I stand before thee and the assembled people, bearing the silver *pandang*, symbol of thy might and power, which in my youth and wilful love I disgraced.

"Thou, who for long has been neglected, till thy just wrath burst into flame, so that the crops no longer ripen and the herds cease to bring forth young, lift, I beseech Thee, *Aki* Maboga, the shadow of thy anger from off my race.

"Through me and for my sin my people have been punished; through me, oh *Aki*, pronounce the penance thou dost claim."

She ceased, and as a wailing cry rose from the assembled natives, slipped slowly to her knees, and flinging her arms round the great jar's neck, rested her lips upon its blackened rim.

Walkely stirred, but Dennis' warning hand bade him keep still. Gaga, speechless and with bulging eyes, stared at the kneeling figure.

A wind was stirring in the trees. The moon had sunk completely out of sight, and here and there a flickering torch gutted and burnt out.

Thus in the creeping darkness they waited, while the moments grew to minutes burdened with suspense—waited for Maboga's answer that his deep black lips would whisper in Jeebe's listening ear.

At length with infinite grace she rose, and stood clothed in her long black hair behind the great blue jar; for on its swelling shoulders glinting against its deep black lip, the silver *pandang* lay.

The wind was sighing in the trees. The rustling leaves made soft accompaniment to her voice, which trembled with emotion.

"My lips have kissed the sacred *Gusi*—my tears have washed its deep black lip. The silver *pandang* has returned to deck the shrine of the Great Spirit, who has spoken, for my ears have caught his whispering breath."

A murmur rose, then faded, and she continued.

"Rejoice, oh people, for I see the crops on all the hillsides ripening and herds with their young. But for his clemency, Maboga asks a price."

She paused; then stretching out her arms cried in a ringing voice: "What will you give, my people, to allay your desperate plight?"

Quick as the summer lightning, swift as an adder's tongue, came the answer from those rows of waiting natives.

"What the white man took, let him repay, with interest. The head of the white man's brother we will give, as a make-peace to Maboga, and as thy wedding gift."

She raised her hand, and there was silence.

"Thy words are good; thy offering acceptable unto—"

Her words were drowned in a great shout of fear, as a lighted torch fell from its bamboo socket on to the palm-roofed house.

Like running water, fanned by the rising breeze, the flames spread rapidly, till in the twinkling of an eye the wooden house was nothing but three hundred feet of sheeted flame.

Then pandemonium reigned and terror stalked the glade.

But to the watching three, the fire was providential, for the burning house lit up the hut, till now hidden in the gloom, and at its single window they beheld young Glister's blood-stained face.

Under the shadow of the trees, skirting the edge of the tiny plain, they raced. A few more yards and they would reach the door; another second—out of the shadows by the hut a naked figure sprang, her long black hair streaming in the breeze, a glittering, sharp-edged sword in her hand.

With an oath, Walkely forged ahead, but missing his footing on a twisted root, stumbled and fell.

The sudden, instinctive tightening of his fingers, a flare and a sharp report; a cry of pain, a sagging, drooping form—and Jeebe lay a crumpled figure across the threshold of the hut.

A YEAR of plenty had elapsed since the Feast of the *Gusi*, and Dennis was going "on leave."

Lolling over the taffrail of the steamer which would take him to Singapore, he talked to Walkely, who had come to see him off.

For a few minutes the two smoked in friendly silence. Then Walkely spoke.

"By the way, Old Thing," he said. "I mustn't forget to give you Gaga's greetings, and young Glister's best salaams."

Dennis grunted thanks. Then his hand fell on Walkely's arm.

"And you, Walley?" he asked.

"Fit as a fiddle," came the irrelevant reply, "for the flowers are growing again on Glister's grave and he no longer haunts the house."

