

The King's Eyebrow



by Loring
Brent

I.

TERRENCE LARKIN lurched down the steps from the hut, with dark, worry lines extending from the corners of his mouth, and walked in deep thought in the direction of the sawmill. Half-way down the path, he turned to glance back at the white-faced girl in the doorway. She waved her hand and smiled reassuringly.

So intent was his mind upon the problem that Larkin walked beyond the sawmill and away out upon the sand beach to the very water's edge before he collected himself.

Usually he would have become angry at himself for such laxity. He was aware that tropical heat has an insidious way of attacking a man's presence of mind as well as his health. For the last two years he had been on the lookout for symptoms. So far they had not put in an appearance.

His frown of anxiety cleared a trifle as he recrossed the beach and took the path leading under the clump of palms into the rear of the sawmill.

It is possible that the impressive heap of ironwood arrayed alongside the mill caused the anxiety to slip a degree. Something, too, in the attitude of the natives, who were passing slabs of the heavy, dark wood to the saw table when he entered, very likely could have caused his mood to brighten materially.

Terrence Larkin had had a hard two

years of it. The superintendent before him had left affairs in confusion. Larkin's two years had been after the fashion of a furious house-cleaning.

He had driven and beaten and trained his small army of Malays until now he could depend upon them. Except in rare cases, his mastery of them was absolute.

When Larkin entered the mill, the heavy atmosphere of moldy dust informed him—if the sharp whine of the saw beforehand had not—that his Malays had their hearts in the work. He inspected the mill hurriedly, making sure that enough lumber was coming in from the forests to keep the saw gang occupied, and retraced his steps to the knoll where his hut was situated overlooking the mill.

His wife was seated in a small heap against the roof post, her fingers hanging limply at her sides. Her chin was sunk upon her breast. She seemed scarcely to be breathing. Evidently she was not aware of his approach, for her face, usually brave, was convulsing as if actuated by an inner pain.

Larkin crept toward her on tiptoe, filled suddenly with a feeling of self-loathing. Something in her attitude reminded him of a flower that droops and wilts for lack of nourishment. He made up his mind that this nonsense would continue no longer if he could possibly help it.

"Lucianna," he whispered gently.

The girl straightened up with a fright-

ened look, her hands trembling. The smile she gave him was pitiful. It hurt. He wished she would storm and rage, but not continue to repress her feelings.

"I'm—tired to-day, Terry," murmured Lucianna, resting her head on his shoulder as he sat down on the step beside her.

Larkin nodded slowly without replying, while his eyes saw red.

"Are you keeping track of the Tjibotas?" he asked after a while.

"Yes," said Lucianna disinterestedly.

She put her hand lightly on his arm and arose, sighing. Entering the hut, she returned with a large wall calendar with black crosses in the squares occupied by the dates.

The crosses approached to within two squares of a red circle, which was the day upon which the Dutch coasting steamer Tjibotas, hailing from Sourabaya, Singapore, and other way ports, would creep into the island's harbor and cast anchor.

"The Tjibotas should arrive the day after to-morrow," said Lucianna. "I do hope that Edith is on board. And, of course," she added listlessly, "your new assistant."

Larkin studied her expression out of the corner of his eye and glared at the blue water of the harbor with renewed hostility. Whitecaps were dancing on its surface. Behind the coral reef, inshore, a black dorsal fin lazily cut the water. He had not yet grown tired of this exotic island, and he could not understand why his wife had taken such a sudden dislike to it.

"Lucianna," he said finally, "I want you to get your things ready. You're going to Japan for a vacation."

He stared up at the gently waving palms overhead, and listened with satisfaction to Lucianna's long gasp of astonishment.

"Terry!" she finally managed to exclaim. Then she pouted. "I won't leave you," she declared softly. "I'm going to stick it out. My place is here with you." She drew his head down against hers.

"No," said Larkin, emphasizing it by a resolute shake of his fist. "You know what a stubborn brute I am, Luci. I've been watching you pass away by inches for the past three months. You need a rest;

you must have a complete change. Besides, Edith can manage things here while you're away. It will do her good."

Lucianna showed her approval of her husband's stubbornness by kissing the back of his neck, squeezing his large hand, and patting his weather-beaten cheek.

"Terry, you're a dear!" was her ultimatum.

II.

TRAVELING very swiftly, allowing scant rest for meals and sleep, an unusually competent Malay runner could cover the distance between the harbor of Sinabonga, where the ironwood colony was situated, and the upper foot-hills of Mount Suma, where his majesty King Niringai held forth, in no less than five days and five nights.

By the shortest of short cuts—knowing the lay of the land perfectly—the king and a chosen few of his warriors had honored Terrence Larkin by a visit about a year after he had been put in charge of the resources of the island by the East Indian Company.

The visit had been pleasant for both.

King Niringai, after proudly exhibiting a waist-band of scalps which he had acquired during his feverish youth, had been permitted to moisten his greedy lips with a pale, burning fluid, which shortly caused the most delightful thoughts to course through his crafty little brain.

The upshot of the visit was a somewhat varied decision on the parts of the guest and his host.

In the course of the conversation, Larkin was permitted to inspect white, waxy samples carried in a leather pouch about King Niringai's swarthy neck. These lumps were easily classified by the pungency of their odor as gum camphor.

It was, therefore, Larkin's prompt decision that King Niringai must be put to work gathering camphor for the East Indian Company.

On the other hand, the king of the head-hunters, who had never rested his shrewd eyes upon a white man before, developed an intense desire for the curly, blond scalp of Terrence Larkin.

Because King Niringai was essentially indolent, and because Terrence Larkin's time was too fully absorbed by the contingencies which accompany the lumbering of ironwood, neither's plan had progressed beyond the indicated stage. Then a curious thing happened which made the king believe that he was a young warrior again.

A sixteen-year-old Dyak maiden had floated ashore, half starved and unconscious, in an outrigger canoe of queer design at the coral beach which forms the base on that side of the island of Mount Suma.

She spoke a quaint dialect, differing from the guttural richness of the king's Straits Malay; and King Niringai, who, above all else, was a slave to novelty and caprice, took the fair captive as his own.

Pondering heavily upon the circumstance for a number of days, the king became possessed of the notion that the washing ashore of his newest queen was a most propitious sign. Perhaps Khalla, the shy captive, helped him toward that conclusion.

There was intelligence, far beyond the usual Dyak's measure, lurking in the depths of her restless eyes.

Khalla, who until the day of her death would not explain why she came to be drifting in the Indian Ocean, when her native soil was Borneo, took the king's egotism as one of the unfortunate but unavoidable things of this life, and immediately began experimenting to see how far her influence could be extended without rousing his monarchical ire.

Native maidens of the mountain village carried tales to her of a strange race inhabiting the lower levels of the island. Innocently they worked upon Khalla's active curiosity. She did not believe them; but she decided to find out how recklessly they lied.

Khalla had never looked upon a white man. She was a daughter of the jungle. The white blood of an English explorer, whose bones had long since reverted to the soil of Borneo, explained the pinkness under her tan, the astuteness behind her roving, dark eyes, and the delicacy of her features.

Khalla was a mongrel, with a mongrel's

rare cunning. The kingdom of Niringai, whose blue blood ran straight and unerringly over a thousand years to the blessed Seria of Pahang, was laid ceremoniously at Khalla's indifferent, small feet.

What was a small mountain and a tribe of small, grinning people to Khalla, who had been the mistress of measureless jungles? But that queer race living at the base of Mount Suma, described to Khalla by the eager maidens, raised a furrow of immediate interest along the smoothness of her low forehead.

Boldly, even with a trace of insolence, she confronted her master, the king, who squatted on his heels before a small fire which burned in the center of his well-constructed hut.

"*Birahi*, to-morrow at dawn we go to visit the valley peoples?"

King Niringai detected the tone of insolence, and glared stonily at the fire. He lowered his head. Khalla trembled. Indeed, who would not have trembled?

There was a tradition kept alive by the old men of the tribe, in spite of the efforts of succeeding kings to efface it, that the royal line had been cursed by a misdeed committed very early in the career of the dynasty. The details of the crime became shrouded and misty as years passed. The bare fact alone remained.

Each king of the Suma dynasty was punished by a disfigurement. The disfigurement was always the same, generation after generation. It took the form of a ridiculous but horribly misshapen eyebrow, which, instead of traveling in an arch above the eye, arose almost perpendicularly in a bristling, hairy mass, curving backward in the form of a thick simitar toward the center of the forehead.

"The devil's tuft" was its nickname, translated.

In the flickering firelight, the impression upon the beholder of King Niringai's gruesome brow was inclined to be appalling. Khalla, who had learned to fear neither gods, men, nor devils, stood still until the first shock that the disfigurement always caused in her had passed, whereupon she squatted upon the floor, facing King Niringai from the other side of the fire, and

gazed upon him with her most hypnotic expression.

King Niringai, gazing upon the coral-pink tips of her toes, raised his black eyes to her face and demanded an explanation.

"I desire it, *birahi*," replied Khalla dreamily. "Meat and water are ready. Many warriors are ready. We go at dawn."

"*Aie*, of course, of course," replied her king absently. "So be it, *chaya-mata*."

The journey proved to be longer and more dangerous than Khalla expected, but curiosity urged her on. The king and his cortège of picked warriors did not travel this time as the envoys of peace, but as savages, girt and ready for battle. The presence of their queen demanded this.

Teak and ironwood hunters encountered in the foot-hills of Suma gave them to understand that head-hunting was a practise that the white master would not tolerate for an instant. It happened that this was the first time that King Niringai had ever had his vested authority or rights questioned.

Without further parley, the teak-hunter who imparted this advice to the mountain king was struck down with short, acutely sharp spears, while a new thatch of dark hair adorned the thong-belt of King Niringai.

Violent death caused no more important sign than the upraising of an eyebrow on the part of Khalla. Cattle and men of a sort had that much in common. The incident was forgotten in the excitement of new odors and new sights and sounds.

The party crossed the extreme outer spur of the narrow-gage railroad which transported ironwood and teak from the heart of the black forests to the mill at the harbor's edge.

When the coarse black monster puffed hotly past, they sought refuge behind trees, while Khalla stared and caught her breath in wondering admiration.

III.

EDITH BURRELL looked up from her steamer chair on the shady side of the promenade deck as the tall young man with unmannerly red hair and intense blue eyes

approached her, and she experienced a queer mingling of fear and satisfaction when he stopped before her, with his two hands raised in some resemblance to an apologetic gesture, and smiled down at her, giving her an instant's glimpse of two rows of perfectly white teeth.

It was the most natural and friendly of smiles. It seemed to indicate that his presence there before her was the most natural thing that could happen.

There was a somewhat unique motive back of Jack Farley's self-introduction to the young widow. He said to himself:

"I like her. I will tell her so."

If Edith Burrell had not happened just then to be quite amazed and a little frightened at the suddenness of Farley's attentions, she would have been somewhat amused. The piers of Sourabaya were yet in sight. This red-headed young man could hardly have had time to unpack his bags and arrange his stateroom.

"Your name is Mrs. Burrell, isn't it?" he inquired in a rich barytone voice that contained all the elements of friendliness, respect, and dignity.

Mrs. Burrell may have been selfish, but no one could ever accuse her of lacking the true spirit of sportsmanship. She, also, had glanced at the ship's register, and she knew that his name was Jack Farley. She had remarked at the time upon the vigorous termination of the "y" in his last name.

"Yes, Mr. Farley," she said crisply.

It is unfortunate that the tone she used cannot be reproduced here. Yet, Edith Burrell's voice was one of her distinguishing features.

If Jack Farley had been the usual ship-board flirt, it is highly probable that the acquaintance would have ended then and there. Jack Farley prided himself on not being a flirt. At all events, the crispness of Edith's reply did not seem to discourage him in the least.

He snapped his fingers briskly, and then shouted loudly when the deck steward pretended not to hear. When *boy* approached, Farley directed him to draw up a steamer chair alongside that of Mrs. Burrell's. When this detail was arranged—and it all took place so quickly that Edith could only

gasp twice—Jack Farley dropped into the chair beside her.

"I saw you when you came up the companion-ladder, Mrs. Burley," he said with his cheery smile. "I just decided then and there that I wanted to know you; so I looked up your name in the purser's office, found out that we are both bound for the same place, and I came up on deck and looked you up to see if there isn't something, perhaps, that I can do."

He paused and studied the faint smile that had come to her bright lips.

"I hope you don't think I'm impolite, Mrs. Burrell," he went on, with real concern showing in his face and voice. "You see, I'm not much given to formalities and conventionalities. In fact, I ran away from America to escape them as much as anything else. Terry was a senior in my junior year, and we made up our minds between us then that the world, as it's dished out for consumption in America, is too nice for our kind."

"We both wanted to get out on some desert island and be kings. Does that sound ridiculous? Terry got first chance and now I'm going along to be sort of viceroy to Terry. I—I've grown to detest the so-called refinements of civilization. I want more room to prowl around in, a harder bunk to sleep on, and a chance to kick up my heels at the stars when I feel in the mood."

Farley's intense gaze had not strayed from Edith's eyes for a moment during that dissertation. She knew that he was intensely in earnest; that he was doing what many men long to do—casting the world behind him—indeed, precisely what she herself had left America to do.

"I—I think we might just as well waive introductions," said Edith quietly, extending a small hand, which was immediately swallowed in the warm depths of his. "I'm glad to know you, Jack Farley. Indeed I am!"

In the two weeks which elapsed before the Tjibotas cast anchor in the sparkling blue harbor of Sinabonga, Edith Burrell was given an opportunity to discover a variety of disquieting things concerning her red-headed consort.

The first of these was that he took charge of her and her tiny daughter as if they were in constant danger—danger from all sides. He dictated the food they should eat. He dictated the hours they should sleep.

When islanders came aboard at some of the stops, he stood guard over his feminine charges, after the manner of a grizzly bear guarding its cubs. Edith discovered that there was no use to attempt breaking this gentle tyranny.

He was a born protector.

Farley would protect anything smaller and more helpless than himself; that was his nature. It was futile to deny him that privilege.

Occasionally Edith permitted her mind to wander into the past. Comparisons were so natural—so obvious. Farley, compared to the man who was dead, was like granite overtopping crumbling brick.

She checked herself before that comparison took on more serious proportions.

She was a new widow.

She must, she declared to herself, make this man realize that her path of freedom was equally as wide and as clear as he had outlined his to be.

IV.

WHEN the mingled cheers and gibberings of the Malays rolled out over Sinabonga's harbor as a greeting to the lusty toot of the whistle of the Tjibotas and the clank of her anchor chains, Terrence Larkin put his arm about the slim waist of his wife and nearly reversed his decision to allow her to go to Japan.

This morning Lucianna was supremely happy—happier than he had seen her in the hot two months just past. The wanness of her complexion and the tiny wrinkles about her eyes seemed to have been erased by her joy at leaving this sultry spot. She regarded the Tjibotas with a re-kindled interest. She fairly danced when the captain's gig put off from the companion-ladder and moved toward shore.

"If you could only come with me," said Lucianna, turning quickly sobered eyes up to her husband's face, "I—I wouldn't ask for another thing."

Returning her look with tenderness, Larkin gave her parting instructions.

"Don't stay in Java any longer than is absolutely necessary—between boats. If you have a long stop-over in Hong-Kong, be sure and stop at the Peak Hotel. I know there'll be dancing in the down-hill hotels; but I'd rather you wouldn't dance until your health is better."

"Yes, dear," replied Lucianna, with lowered eyes.

"When you reach Hong-Kong, send a cablegram immediately to the Spauldings, and see if they intend to spend the hot months at Nikko. It's wonderful at Nikko. I wish I were going!"

"No more than I!" retorted Lucianna.

They both turned as the bow of the boat cut into the sand of the beach. The gig still was twenty feet or more off shore.

Lucianna grasped Larkin's arm.

"My dear," she exclaimed, "do you see that mass of red? It's hair! It's the hair of a man!"

"It's the hair of one Jack Farley," said Larkin, chuckling. "Watch him do something shocking now."

Jack Farley was standing in the bow of the gig, with his large tanned hands firmly grasping the rail as he quickly surveyed the situation with his keen blue eyes. He estimated the depth of the water, then motioned to the two figures on the seat behind him. Edith appeared to shrink, while her small, flaxen-haired daughter regarded the shore-line with wide-eyed interest.

Grasping the rail on the lee side, Farley vaulted easily into the water, which lapped about his waist. He extended his arms to Edith.

"Hold Dorothy tight," he said, "and sit in my arms. Please, Edith! That's it. Don't jump! Relax. Relax! Pretend you've fainted."

The last advice was hardly necessary. Edith sank down limply in the strong cradle formed by his arms, not relaxing her clawlike hold on Dorothy's frock.

It was not at all unpleasant, Edith decided; she did not realize how strong he was. And she finally regretted that the shore was so close. The situation, she reflected, quite outdistanced anything she

had ever imagined: carried ashore to a tropical island—in the wastes of the Indian Ocean—in the arms of a red-headed outlaw!

The red-headed outlaw evidently forgot her existence the next instant as he sprang to return the brotherly embrace of Terrence Larkin.

Edith's surprise at Lucianna's determination to install her in charge of the domestic realm, while she, Lucianna, was to spend the forthcoming months in the mountains of Japan, was expressed in prettily rounded eyes of resentment and an "Oh!" of brief disappointment; but Edith could spring quickly to meet exigencies and circumstances. A scared look in her brother's eyes gave speed to her impulse.

"Lucianna," she cried, "it's fine you have the opportunity. Have a good time, and don't come back until you're ready. We'll manage somehow."

The triple-throated whistle of the Tjibotas sounded its warning of pending departure. Lucianna found herself feebly squirming in the strong arms of her husband as he transported her to the waiting boat, just as the red-headed Farley had conducted the equally surprised Edith shoreward.

Lucianna wept a little when she kissed him good-by; then she resolutely turned her face toward the Tjibotas—to Japan—and rest!

V.

KING NIRINGAI and his cortège climbed to the summit of a sandy hill when the hoarse voice of the steamer first penetrated the forest thickness, and commented upon the smoking monster in deep monosyllables of concern and interest.

There was a far-away look in Khalla's brown eyes as she indifferently pushed aside two of the headmen who constituted Niringai's personal body-guard.

Respectfully they made room for her, and she took the leading position, with her small hands folded on her slim waist as she stared over the intervening tree-tops to the rim of the enclosed basin and out over the blue water to the blackened hull of the steamer.

"*Saparat!*" commented Khalla. Niringai and the head men nodded mutely. "It is a monster, *birahi*," she added nervously. "I know. Watch."

The remainder of the warriors by this time had swarmed up the sandy hill, and were staring with expressions of fear and distrust at the white dot creeping across the harbor to the steamer's side. Eventually the dot was picked up out of the water and engulfed by the greedy steamer.

Khalla sighed. Perhaps she knew more than she cared to tell; perhaps the sight only stirred within her memories too distant and vague to be of any particular use. She picked a ripe *mangusta* from a low branch, splitting the dark-red skin with her coral-white teeth and allowing the fragrant, rose-colored juice to trickle back upon her tongue.

She reopened her eyes as the deep booming of the Tjibotas's whistle again penetrated the jungle stillness, her expression becoming wistful as the white foam spread in a widening circle from the steamer's propeller. Then Khalla turned sharply to her king.

"*Birahi*," she said with a trace of impatience, "night will soon come. I see poorly by the light of the stars."

Niringai bent a fierce look upon her from under the misshapen brow, but Khalla ignored him with conscious indifference. Niringai felt slighted, as he always did when she ignored his kingly disfigurement, and he ordered his warriors ahead in a tone that indicated a certain nastiness of temper.

It was Khalla who decided for Niringai that the *entourage* should make their final encampment that night within hailing distance of the colony, and proceed to whatever entertainment might be decided upon the following morning as early as possible.

It was a reckless decision, viewed from any angle, and Niringai consented against the openly expressed rebellion of his headmen. Accordingly a cooking fire was kindled on a small hilltop, within fair arrow range of the superintendent's hut. This took place shortly after nightfall.

On the veranda of Larkin's hut, Edith was seated—as the women who occupied

that hut invariably did—in a small heap against the roof post, staring wonderingly out into the darkness. On the same step, across from her, sat Farley, dreamily considering the rosiness of her profile which the smoldering *dong* afforded him.

Within the hut, Larkin was showing Edith's daughter how ingenious mats may be woven from stripped palmetto leaves. Out of her four years of wisdom, Dorothy was devoting herself to this strange, new life with the same intentness that had so endeared her to Farley.

Edith tapped the lower step with her small foot.

"I—I came to Sinabonga because I—I thought I would be free," she declared finally. "I am willing. I want to help. I will do a man's work. But, Jack, this is not Seattle."

"I know that," replied Farley in a slow, deep voice. "But there is work for you to do here. Luci has gone. Some one must attend to the work she did. You are the only one."

"I won't wash dishes!" cried Edith. Her voice indicated tears.

"Edith!" Farley's voice was still firm, but it was gentler. He slid across the step and took her hand. Edith turned somewhat defiant eyes up at him. "You are a fine, dear girl," he said, giving her fingers a squeeze. "Your chief shortcoming is your fear that some one will 'put something over' when you're not looking. Forget that. It's not in tune with the rest of your character."

"I'm sorry—Jack." Edith's expression showed her repentance.

"Some one must see that the food Terry and I are given to eat—is fit to eat," explained Farley. "Some one must see that the native children are given plenty of quinin and salts when they're sick. Your job is a big job. A small woman cannot handle it."

"Really, I'm sorry, Jack," insisted Edith.

She withdrew her hand as Dorothy pattered out upon the veranda to show her mother what miracles could be worked with a little patience and a handful of palmetto strippings.

A Malay crept to the steps from the direction of the native village, at the foot of the hill. Farley, who had spent a year of apprenticeship in Java, and had a fair equipment of the Malay tongue, questioned him.

"They have come," croaked the old villager. "Tell the white master. The headmen from Suma—in war dress, *birahi*."

Farley called Larkin out upon the veranda.

"This old fellow says the warriors from Suma are here. What does he mean, Terry?"

"Niringai—is he here?" demanded Larkin. "And how many men, Marak?"

The Malay shook his head, as if the number were quite beyond his ability to count, but flattened his two palms—once, twice, thrice—four times upon the floor. In his estimate, there were forty.

A red glow on a sand hummock in the region of the jungle's edge took away the need of questioning the locality of King Niringai's force. The distance was not great, although the fire was not close enough to distinguish the features of the ring about it.

Larkin accompanied Marak to the village, where he intended to select a few guards, arm them with rifles, and post them about the hummock, to anticipate and meet any trouble that might arise between now and sunrise.

The superintendent had hardly vanished when another figure, as black as the night from which he emerged and naked except for a loin cloth, approached the veranda.

Farley stood up on the top step. To Niringai's headman he must have appeared gigantic.

"Get my revolver, Edith," he said quietly. "It's in my coat pocket, right side. Quick!" He turned to the man and addressed him in the native tongue.

"Niringai, king of the mountain, says come," replied the head man to Farley's question. "*Birahi*, do not come if you are afraid."

Farley slipped the revolver into his hip pocket as Edith reached his side and motioned the head man to follow him. As

the darkness swallowed them up, a moan from Edith was carried to him.

Khalla withdrew into the bushes away from the firelight as Farley and the head man approached. She settled herself on her knees, parted the bushes, and critically examined the bareheaded figure that swung up with great strides and stopped with a poise of fearlessness before the squatting creature that was King Niringai.

She had never in all of her jungle experience seen such a man. He was a giant. Compared to him, Niringai the brazen was a mongoose. A noiseless sigh issued from her parted lips as her eyes reached his head. This man was a god. His crown was red gold. His eyes burned like angry stars.

Khalla, had her desire not been aroused, could have collapsed from sheer rapture wrought by contemplation of the vision. She crept a little closer, until only a web-work of leaves shielded her vision from the stern eyes of the man. Then she saw that his features were darkened by a frown that outclouded the petty grimaces of her king as mighty darkness overtakes and engulfs uncertain twilight.

As for King Niringai, his head was bent low over the fire, bringing out in its complete hideousness the disfigurement above his eye. The curving tuft of black hair seemed to bristle; small imagination would have made it out to be a crawling, living thing.

Only for an instant Farley stared at the disfigurement as if fascinated. Then he grunted his disgust, and Niringai looked up with a snarl.

Farley raised his voice in a shout of anger which penetrated the forests and silenced them. Along the spine of Khalla it created an ecstatic thrill. On the veranda of the superintendent's hut, it caused Edith to stare more nervously than before at the hummock. The intention of the shout was to inject certain elements of fear into the heart of Niringai and his warriors. To that extent it succeeded.

"Niringai," declared Farley hoarsely—he pronounced it "N'r'r'ing-i-ii"—"what brings you here? Why are you in war dress?"

"Where is the *birahi*?" demanded Niringai, recovering his composure and sinking back on his haunches. "The blond master, bring him to me."

"What brings you here, Niringai?" demanded Farley, who had yet to learn the double working Malay mind.

"The *birahi* is my friend," replied Niringai cautiously, shifting his glance from the eyes of Farley to the fire.

With the tips of his long, clawlike fingers, the mountain king moved a stick upon the flame.

It might have been a signal.

A great light splashed in the rear of Farley's brain, and he sprawled back limply. This feat was accomplished with the weighted handle of a spear in the hands of one of the headmen. Farley was trussed up, gagged with a palm branch, and rolled under a bush.

Unhappily for the designs of Kink Niringai, the bush was that behind which Khalla was devouring the pantomime. The red-headed god rolled weightily upon her arkles. She stifled her expression of pain, glanced shrewdly at the ring holding new consultation about the fire and produced a long, thin dagger from her waist.

Khalla did not apply the knife to Farley's bonds until after she reassured herself that the curling red thatch of hair was as soft as it looked. She ran her fingers through it experimentally several times, until she came in contact with the bleeding bruise caused by the headman's lance.

Sighing gently, she slit the cords which bound his hands and feet, unwrapped the gag, and turned his face gently toward the firelight. Farley had not yet regained consciousness.

The diverting insolence of the intruder ceased to interest his majesty when Farley was conveniently whisked from his sight. Niringai gave orders to extinguish the fire, and crept down the hill with his personal body-guard to inspect more closely the hut, where he had derived such pleasure on his previous visit.

Larkin evidently was still engaged in rounding up an expeditionary force in the village. There was but one crouching figure on the veranda.

Edith, maintaining her vigil, stared with growing anxiety and fear into the blackness.

In the center of the veranda behind her, directly under the fluttering *dong*, Dorothy was still playing at mat-making. It was the brightness of her yellow hair that attracted Niringai.

Larkin's hair, reflected the monarch of Suma, was night compared to this. That future life or happiness of the girl depended upon his greed for a cluster of that golden hair at his thong-belt, King Niringai did not consider.

If a Malay king desires a thing, it must be procured for him. King Niringai desired, above all else just now, the hair of Dorothy. He saw no reason why he should not obtain it.

The king and his two headmen advanced more slowly. When the light of the *dong* fell upon the leering countenance of Niringai, Edith screamed and in fainting carried with her the hideous vision of the kingly disfigurement. When she recovered consciousness, Dorothy as well as the black horror had vanished.

VI.

LARKIN'S delay in recruiting enough Malays who could handle Winchesters was the natural result of the training he had given them in his two years on the island. He had broken them to his own will—individually, in most cases. He had taught them that fighting of any sort was sinful, and their subsequent progress in the island's industry proved that his advice was good.

To-night he wanted men who could handle rifles. He was aware that Niringai, with his forty hunters, could outfight one hundred of his best woodsmen by native methods. He realized that if he could equip his force with rifles he would drive off the mountain men with such complete defeat that Niringai would not likely approach the coast again.

By the time Larkin had gotten together a dozen of his younger woodsmen and armed them with rifles and ammunition from the storehouse, considerable time had elapsed. They approached the hut to find

that Edith was emerging from a dead faint and gazing dazedly about her.

At sight of them her senses seemed to return completely. She climbed to her feet with a horrified look. Her hair was disarranged. Her skin was moist with cold perspiration. Her eyes were staring.

"Dorothy," she managed to gasp. "Where—where is Dorothy?"

Larkin made a frantic search of the house while his woodsmen explored the bushes around it. Aware of the importance of each instant, Larkin ordered the natives into an irregular mass formation and started in the direction of the hummock.

It was the path that had been taken by King Niringai and his headmen only a few minutes previous. Screaming, Dorothy had been silenced by a large, evil-smelling hand which was pressed down upon her mouth, and she was borne up the hummock, struggling in the steel embrace of one of Niringai's headmen.

It was at this juncture that King Niringai disqualified himself forever as an astute soldier in the eyes of his warriors. He was not satisfied with having seen the yellow tresses of the little girl; a fire must be kindled immediately so that he could gloat upon his captive.

His headmen protested. He silenced them with snarls. It may be added that King Niringai had secured, from the shelf in the hut, a bottle resembling that from which he had extracted such good cheer on his previous visit, a year before.

The bottle did not contain rare old brandy; it contained the most potent and fiery of Burmese rums. The first taste gagged King Niringai, and in swallowing it he saw red. Nevertheless, it performed its task pleasantly, once downed.

The fire-makers, having discovered embers of the old fire, soon started a meager blaze. It was not enough. King Niringai desired to notify the entire countryside of his triumph and disdain.

Farley, opening his eyes, beheld the strange picture of a king in the act of lifting a brown bottle to his thick lips, while in his other hand he held a clump of yellow hair. Dashing aside the warm hand that was tenderly caressing his head, Farley

sprang at the figure with his fingers outstretched. The king snarled, dropping both bottle and hair, and the slim figure of the unconscious Dorothy slid down at his side.

Somehow, Farley extracted the revolver from his pocket with his right hand and seized the girl in his left.

King Niringai vanished into the bushes.

A headman arose before him. Farley fired, the headman grunted, collapsed, and clutched his abdomen. Another black head on a misshapen body sprang to stop him. A spear flashed by him. A second tongue of flame lanced the darkness, and he saw the figure wilt.

Figures swarmed about him as he sprang down the slope. The first was Larkin, who flashed an electric lantern in his face. As the light was switched off, an arrow stung him in the shoulder like the bite of a giant hornet.

"Up on the hill," shouted Farley, "the whole tribe of them. Shoot low!"

As he staggered up on the veranda, the Malay woodsmen opened fire on King Niringai and his followers. The first volleys were returned briskly by arrows and spears. Then the king's men retreated in confusion toward the heart of the jungle.

It was orderly confusion; they did not advertise their going. Among the very last to leave was Khalla, to whom the shrieking bullets in the darkness meant nothing. She tried to catch a last glimpse of the red-headed god, and failed. The night's work left her with a single resolve:

She must possess the red-headed man for her own.

VII.

MORNING found Jack Farley raving in delirium. The wound in his scalp was clean, but the hole in his shoulder became red and then black. The arrow had been poisoned.

Edith, after the shock of recovering Dorothy had passed, had given her whole attention to the injured man. She had applied caustics and powerful antiseptics to the wound, draining it constantly. Finally, to stop the pain, she had administered drugs.

During that night, with her nerves on

knife edges, she analyzed herself. The agonized man on the white cot spoke her name constantly, and she realized that if this trial should prove her to be worthy she was completely his.

She passed her cool, white hand over the hot forehead and slipped her fingers under the masses of soft red hair. The lids were blue-white over his eyes; his sensitive mouth was drawn down in pain. Frequently his facial muscles, under the wet skin, quivered convulsively.

This handsome, reckless youth was hers! Farley had said as much himself, she argued.

His pain seemed to be increasing. She got out the antiseptic bottles again and examined the wound. The redness was spreading. It meant fight—a grim, hard, long fight against death. The forces in Farley's favor were his tremendous vitality, his buoyant youth—and her courage—her help!

The inquisitive red rays of the tropical sunrise discovered new lines in Edith Burrell's face. They were the lines which can come only to those who bear the sufferings of others. They are lines of sacrifice. Perhaps they are not beautifying, but they are kindly.

She left the bedside long enough to slip down to the harbor, seek out a secluded spot, undress, and yield herself to the warmth of the clear, blue water. She splashed about for several minutes and, greatly refreshed by the swim, redressed and returned to the bedside.

Farley was sleeping more easily, although the distortion of his features caused by the deep pain had by no means disappeared. Larkin, appearing worn out from the night's trials, came in while Edith redressed the arrow wound and examined it closely.

"As usual," he said with a faint smile, "Jack is lucky. The arrow was poisoned with *pyingato*, a slow poison extracted from the bark of a jungle tree. I've seen it before. All a man needs to overcome *pyingato* is lots of vitality. Jack has the vitality.

"One of my best woodsmen was struck last night by an arrow with the *other* kind

of poison. Nothing could have saved him. He was dead in five minutes. The arrows that kill almost instantly are dipped into poison extracted from venomous snakes, such as the cobra. I—I am glad for you, Edith, that Jack will pull through. Do you mind if I tell you, now that I see the direction the wind is taking, that I never was extremely fond of husband number one?"

"That is a brother's right," murmured Edith softly. "But don't let's talk about him. Let's—let's talk about Jack!"

Farley, at the repetition of his name, slowly opened his eyes. The pupils were dilated, the whites bloodshot. There was no evidence of recognition in his stare.

"Up there on the hill," he muttered, "N'r'r'ing-i-ii, why, damn you, I'll kill you, you black skunk! Let go of her. Damn your black hide, N'r'r'ing-i-ii—"

Farley's eyes closed as his voice rumbled deeper and more unintelligibly in his throat. The eyes reopened glaringly.

"I wouldn't kill you," he muttered contemptuously. "I won't dirty my hands with your worthless life." Farley pushed himself up on one elbow and pointed an unsteady finger at Larkin. "N'r'r'ing-i-ii, I'll stamp your damn pride in the mud. Eh? I'll tear that black thing off your face, N'r'r'ing-i-ii. That crawling, beastly eyebrow! It marks you as a black king, and I'll tear it out of your head!"

"Poor boy!" murmured Edith.

"I am afraid," said Larkin, "that Jack's reckless brain is at work on some mischief. Do you understand what he's talking about?"

"He's delirious," said Edith gently, "but he's raving about that black devil's horrible eyebrow. I can understand him, when he doesn't use Malay."

The sick man turned his face up to hers. His eyes were strained and red, but the spark of intelligence had returned to them.

"I am not delirious," he said weakly. "Have you two heard what I said? When I am able to, I will go; and I will not come back until I have done exactly what I said. You did not see him as I saw him. You cannot understand. I never wanted a man's blood before." Farley sank back on his pillow. "Where is Dorothy?"

"Playing in the compound," said Edith faintly. "She is safe, dear."

"She might not have been safe," declared Farley. "But I'm—I'm nearly dead now. My legs are numb. Terry, how soon will I be able to walk—and fight?"

"Not for a month at least, Jack. You must wait for that poison to leave your system. If you still want to go after Niringai then, I'll help you. But please, old man—"

"Terry!" Farley raised himself by both hands to a sitting position. His blue eyes were like points of steel. The rumpled red hair gave him a mad appearance. His teeth were bared. "Terry," he declared with slow emphasis, "I am going out there"—Farley pointed—"out there—alone. Myself, when I'm healed, and a knife. No one else. Understand?" He sank back again and smiled grimly. "It sounds ridiculous. It is ridiculous! But I am going to stake my life against a black king's—eyebrow!"

VIII.

KING NIRINGAI withdrew from the teak-wood camp at the harbor's rim, hardly caring in which direction he progressed. The casualties did not interest him in the least. He knew that there were, in the homeward-bound throng of warriors, somewhere in the vicinity of forty able fighters. There were gaps in his line; but he did not care.

The visible effects of the Burmese rum extended over a period of several hot, jungle days. While the liquid delight lasted, Niringai was content to gather his children in a semicircle about him in the shade of some tree, there sipping the fiery stuff.

But as surely as night follows day, rancor followed the inspired joy in Niringai's black heart, and he resorted to some of his cruelest tricks before the green line of palmetto huts on the side of Mount Suma was reached.

Niringai's temples throbbed. His eyes ached. He was obsessed with a strangling thirst. It did not occur to Niringai to lay the blame for these symptoms upon his selfish use of the brown bottle. It was his kingly prerogative to lay the blame upon whoever he desired.

Khalla came in for her share of abuse. She was moody; the sudden loss of her red-headed god irritated her. All of her life a wild creature of the jungle, Khalla's very next step was dictated by capricious desire.

She could be striding in soft, pantherlike steps through a thicket, her thoughts flitting like birds through the leaves, when suddenly a bright orange or a ripe *mangusta* would attract her.

The thoughts would pause for a moment as she climbed to reach the fruit. Then they would scatter afar, and she would continue, wandering aimlessly. It was a beautiful life, indeed, but it lacked all of the balancing elements of selflessness.

Nearing the foot-hills, King Niringai grew tired. He grunted continuously as the grade became steeper, and he called more loudly, more frequently, and more irritably for assistance.

He was conscious of dull, gnawing pains in the regions of his stomach. Once, when these became too trying, he jabbed his nearest warrior with the acute point of his spear. The headman groaned aloud, calling upon his gods to witness his misery; whereat King Niringai jabbed him vigorously in the other shoulder.

Khalla squatted before the cook-fire that night to roast some green nuts she had gathered. For some moments Niringai studied her in brooding silence from his place on the other side. His thick lips were parted in a grinning grimace of pain and discomfort.

Since leaving the lumber colony, his majesty had pondered at intervals upon the retreat from the hummock. What might have terminated in an honorable victory had become a disgraceful defeat. In more than one respect, Niringai knew that Khalla was responsible.

Bending upon Khalla the malicious "devil's tuft," Niringai looked up at her sharply from half-closed eyes. He was more disappointed than usual when he observed that the disfigurement had no effect upon her. Khalla stared at the bristling eyebrow with a sort of spirited contempt.

"*Pergi lekas skalli*," he observed at length, "I do not like you as before, Khalla."

"*Birahi*," Khalla replied in her honeyed accents, "you are a mongoose. I detest a mongoose. He kills snakes, and snakes are my friends."

Niringai shivered a little in the twilight. Snakes were not his friends.

Khalla brushed the curly hair back from her misty eyes. Daylight faded. The firelight emphasized the delicacy of her features. Niringai studied her long and thoughtfully.

She must be a witch, he decided. It would never do to have her arrayed against him. There was something fascinating in Khalla's eyes as they rested mysteriously on the bright embers.

Most eyes staring at a fire, so Niringai had observed, became dreamy and distant. Khalla's eyes seemed to stare at the fire as if it were the rift in a mountain through which a distant view of the sea or the mountains or the stars could be gained.

Khalla shifted her eyes upon her king, and they filled with unspeakable contempt. Her thoughts had not been of the sea or stars; they had been immersed in rapt vision of the red-headed god.

As the weeks passed, Khalla's contempt for Niringai and Niringai's fear of Khalla grew until each became insupportable. Niringai's mind was a shallow thing at best: it was not capable of plumbing the eery recesses and exotic depths of this wild creature, borne to him from the sea.

The monotony of the mountain village drove Khalla on visits farther and farther into the jungle. Soon, her visits were lengthened to days, finally to weeks. This was the freedom of her earlier youth, the freedom that she loved.

She explored the coral caves at the base of Suma. Gradually her mind charted a precise map of Mount Suma, its foot-hills, and the animal lanes which allowed one to penetrate swiftly the jungles which ranged below them.

With her confidence gaining daily, she devoted more thought to her yearning. Deep within her was the thought that the red-haired god some day would search the jungle and find her.

Khalla was to him, as he was to her. That had been decided long before she was

born. That is probably the only item of religion that ever penetrated Khalla's pagan mind—predestination. As the thought developed, an appeal came to Khalla's practical side: she must help him find her.

She strode off determinedly one morning just as the hilltops were changing from silver to gold. Her heart burned with a fierce desire, but she proceeded cautiously, for it would never do to be captured.

When she reached the hill that commanded a view of the harbor, from which Niringai and she and their warriors had watched the going of the Tjibotas, she decided to circumnavigate the camp, approaching it from the very farthest side. Instinctively she was aware that teak and ironwood hunters would not trespass there.

Traveling like the wind, she seemed scarcely to touch the ground. Her small tanned feet were hardened, quite immune to thorns and sharp stones. And Khalla did not fear snakes. There was something not unlike a snake's glitter in her eyes at times, such as is often found in creatures who are abroad at night.

The colony was unchanged. Climbing to the top branches of a tree, Khalla picked out its details with her bright eyes. She heard the whine of the sawmill and shivered. For a moment she watched the glint of the sun on the blue waters of the harbor.

The breeze bore to her a queer odor, which she classified as cooking food of some nature, foreign to her. Smoke arose from an open fire behind the highest hut. A Malay woman was preparing food over it. Khalla licked her lips daintily.

Khalla would have been quite content to sit on the limb indefinitely if the door of the hut had not suddenly opened, while a tall, slender man with red hair walked weakly out upon the veranda.

At his appearance Khalla nearly lost her hold and fell. She caught her breath; then her brow darkened. A woman—a white woman—followed him. She was supporting him by one elbow. Khalla could see that a look of concern and sympathy was on the woman's face, and she could see, too, that the woman was beautiful and strangely garbed.

Khalla slipped down from the branch,

filled with disappointment. Her red-haired god had allowed another woman to touch him! To Khalla, who had built her air-castles with unsparing lavishness, it seemed incredible. But Khalla did not turn back. She ate a silent and angry meal, comprising an alligator pear and an orange, and returned to the tree.

The red-haired one was sitting alone on the edge of the veranda this time. Khalla noted that he stared continuously at the jungle, as if there was some one in that locality whose life he desired; for his look was angered and vengeful. Khalla hitched herself a little farther up into the tree and watched with a new interest.

Farley sat on the steps for several hours without moving. Then he got up, stretched, and walked to the beach, returning at a brisk pace.

In the evening, as Khalla listened, she heard voices raised in dissension coming from the direction of the veranda. The next morning, as she watched from the tree, the red-haired god left the hut, paused to grip the hand of another man nearly as large, and strode toward the beach.

IX.

A WOMAN can find out many disagreeable things about any man by nursing him through a severe illness.

The three months that Edith Burrell spent at the sick-bed of Jack Farley were a liberal education to her in the art of self-denial.

Farley was not more troublesome than the usual strong, healthy man who is struck down suddenly. But he was exacting. He had told her at the beginning that she would regret her sacrifice. Indeed, he had demanded that a Malay woman, skilled in nursing, should take the responsibility and work from Edith's shoulders. And Edith had, quite as resolutely, denied that request.

They spent many wonderful hours together when his shoulder did not pain him. They took delight in exploring each other's minds, gently calling attention to each other's shortcomings, and much of the time they devoted to lengthy and aimless discussions regarding the worldly freedom that

they both sought, whose strong desire had caused both of them to put behind them the niceties of civilization, and where, in the end, the desire would lead them to.

As Farley grew stronger, abstract discussions gradually ceased to interest him. The threat he had made, after the defeat of Niringai's band, was studiously and consciously avoided as a conversational topic.

Sitting by his side during the long afternoons, Edith watched the expressions come and go on his face as he slept or pretended to sleep. As the wound healed and his strength flowed back, she detected more and more frequently the look of hatred that she had seen on his face the morning after the fight on the hummock.

It was not until his recovery was almost complete that he made the final shocking discovery which sealed his decision. Edith had kept that discovery from him as long as possible. In the end she knew he would find out.

One afternoon Dorothy skipped into the room and kneeled down at his side. His attitude and interest were as devoted as a bloodless relation can ever be, and the little girl returned every ounce of the love he gave her. He reached out to pat her head. For some reason Dorothy turned; so that her face was away from his.

Involuntarily, Edith gasped. Farley sat bolt upright. His fingers had come in contact with a healed scar. He drew the little girl up on the bed beside him and lifted the mass of her flaxen hair. A pink scar, now quite healed, ran crosswise at the base of her head.

Dorothy slipped from his arms and crept to her mother's side. There was a look of fright in her wide, blue eyes.

"Why didn't you tell me?" demanded Farley.

"You were ill. I—I was afraid," answered Edith in a low voice.

It was the following morning that Khalla, from her perch in the tree-top, saw Farley leave the house and walk to the beach. His recovery, he decided, had progressed far enough. Over the heated protests of Terrence Larkin, he announced his intention of leaving at once to find "N'r'r'ing-i-ii," and settle the score.

The spark of health had found its way back to Farley's eyes. His cheeks, pale from the confinement, glowed with youth and the old-time vigor. He was thin and wan-looking, and his stride lacked its accustomed sureness; but otherwise he was the same fearless, reckless Farley.

To expedite matters, Larkin reluctantly consigned one of the narrow-gage engines to him which would conduct him twelve miles toward his goal, and he also provided him with a rough map of the island.

Farley was in the jungle by noon. He intended to depend upon the jungle for food, and his equipment was light. Except for a light lunch that Edith prepared for him, his only encumbrance was a long, exceedingly sharp sheath-knife which he carried in a leather pocket in his belt.

With the coming of night the jungle seemed to close in about him, a throbbing, living world, completely peopled, self-sustained—an entity unto itself.

By sunup he hoped to recover his bearings. He was not discouraged, not even surprised. As the stars appeared through the linked foliage above him and the jungle sounds pressed closer and increased in boldness and intensity, his only feeling was one of smallness—of contemptible smallness—in the face of a force which he had thoroughly underestimated.

Farley did not fear the jungle inhabitants. If a beast should overpower him; if a poisonous snake should strike him—it would be unfortunate but unavoidable. Close contact with tropical life had made him a fatalist to that narrow extent. Farley had a fulsome respect for the inevitable.

X.

FARLEY shook himself, stretched his arms luxuriously and made a critical inventory of the jungle as it is at break of day. The fragrance of wild orchids, encouraged by the dew, was in his nostrils. Monkeys chattered above him in the tree-tops. The long grass which covered the knoll on which he had slept was drenched in the morning dew.

From his point of view, progress in the direction of Mount Suma appeared to be

highly problematical. The clearing in the center of which the knoll was situated was hedged in on all perceptible quarters by trees—stout trees, thin trees, and trees that apparently rambled in every direction.

Thick interlacing of orchid and gourd vines further complicated matters.

It was at this juncture in his mental notations that Khalla, who had slept in the trees above him, slid noiselessly down the trunk and shyly approached him.

The aura that an unheard, unseen presence creates, caused his muscles to freeze. He knew there was something or someone moving behind him, long before her footfall—an intentional crumpling of dry leaves—communicated itself to his active consciousness.

Farley sprang to his feet and confronted her. The knife in his hand slipped out and struck the soft earth as he measured his antagonist. A grunt of astonishment escaped his lips.

Khalla, blinking, as if uncertain how to proceed, presently allowed her eyes to meet his in a gaze that could be construed to mean nothing more nor less than surrender. Then she smiled a little nervously—and shifted her weight to the other foot.

"*Birahi*," she said finally, slowly, for fear that he might not understand her tongue, "you are lost."

"Yes," he replied in a voice of blunt inquiry, "I am lost. Who are you?"

Khalla lowered her eyes and sank down at his feet confidently.

"I have watched you many days," she told him. "I knew you would come. I have been waiting," she added simply.

"Are you from—N'r'r'ing-i-i?" he demanded.

"N'ringi is a mongoose," returned Khalla contemptuously. "He is a mongoose. Some day I will kill him. What—is your name? Mine is Khalla."

Farley considered this.

"The red god of vengeance," he said. "Khalla—if your name is really Khalla—tell me what you are doing here."

"I knew you were a god, and even gods may be lost," replied Khalla with evident satisfaction. "I am here to protect you. A large snake watched you last night—

kaparat—an ugly orang-gila. He is gone now, is he not, red god?"

"But what do you intend to do, homeless one?" demanded Farley.

"I will walk by your side, *birahi*. You are a helpless little child here. What do you intend to do, red god?"

"I—I am going to Suma—to N'r'r'-ing-i-ii!"

"To kill N'r'r'-ing-i-ii?" asked Khalla in a small voice, softly mouthing Farley's pronunciation of Suma's lord.

Farley nodded grimly.

"Perhaps—he will die. You do not care?"

"Aie, N'ringi is a mongoose," she cried. "Some day I shall wear his devil's tuft as a charm."

"Unless I desire it instead, Khalla."

"*Birahi*, you shall wear it as a charm," she declared with quick penitence, "but it is wicked if improperly worn."

"Will you show me the way to Suma?" he demanded impatiently.

"That is not a question to ask of me, *birahi*," replied Khalla reproachfully.

Deftly, Khalla prepared their breakfast. It was to be the first of a monotonously similar series of meals of *man'gustas*, of oranges and wild nuts to which Farley would slowly become inured.

After the unusual meal, Khalla brought him in a broken gourd, water from a spring and then led the way into the thick of the jungle. He was astonished at the progress that could be made in company with one who thoroughly understood the lanes and byways of such perplexing country.

One day shortly before the coming of night Khalla led him to the base of a granite escarpment which overhung the rising valley and directed him to climb.

It was dangerous work. Footholds were deceiving. The face of the cliff was sheer. As he reached the summit, the sun was sinking, and he gasped audibly at the panorama which was spread out before him.

Far to the left was the dark blue of the Indian Ocean. To the right, the jungle dipped in undulating waves of richest green. A great black eagle paused in its flight overhead and shrieked at him. Straight ahead arose the flanks of Mount

Suma, which had never before been trodden by white man. The foliage seemed not so dense in that direction.

Farley had hardly had time to take in the view in one quick glimpse when a flutter at his elbow apprised him that Khalla, despite her apparent tenderness, had scaled the granite wall and stood beside him, breathing easily. He looked down at her with admiration.

"*Chaya-mata*, you are brave," he said.

"I will follow you to the end of the world, *birahi*," she replied smiling.

Farley slid down the granite wall in silence, as the thought of Khalla's open statement took hold of his imagination.

Up to now, Farley had taken Khalla at face value. To him, she was a youthful outlaw, and he was glad that she had taken him in charge in one of her capricious moments. He fully expected her to leave him any morning as suddenly and as quietly as she had come. That her intentions might be more enduring and deeper he did not believe for a moment.

However, he studied her quite carefully as she scrambled down the wall and approached his side. She was a mere child, thought Farley. He took her hand as a brother might take his sister's hand, and they walked silently toward Mount Suma in the gathering darkness.

The trees were more widely spaced here, and progress more rapid. Farley stopped frequently to examine the trees with the aid of a small pocket flashlight—the only luxury he permitted himself to carry.

Probably one tree out of twenty so examined seemed to arouse his interest. From these trees, small chunks of bark and wood were missing. He cut away several samples with his knife and put them away carefully in his pockets.

"*Birahi*," murmured Khalla, on one of these occasions, eyeing him wonderingly, "by to-morrow night we will see N'r'r'-ing-i-ii. You are prepared?"

Farley looked at her with satisfaction.

"I am prepared for a dozen N'r'r'-ing-i-ii's" he replied. "Will this place do to spend the night?"

"Aie, it is an excellent spot, *birahi*," said Khalla softly.

"To-morrow night," declared Farley, "Suma will have a new king."

"I know," returned Khalla wisely, "the red god will be king," and she lowered her eyes.

They prepared to take possession of the place for the night. It was a simple proceeding, and the one they always followed. Farley plucked large handfuls of tough grass and piled them in a heap for his bed. Then he helped Khalla reach the lower bough of the tree which overspread his mat-like couch. There was an uncanny nimbleness in the way she sprang upward to some flat limb which suited her.

XI.

IN the morning, after a hasty breakfast, they pressed on up the mountain. The atmosphere became lighter and cooler as noon approached. Occasionally, through cuts in the mountain they caught glimpses of the ocean.

Farley by now was a ragged sight. Thorns had torn his khaki pants and coat in countless places. The light canvas skirt and blouse of Khalla seemed to be impervious to all injury. He constantly wondered how she kept it so marvelously clean. The thick red stubble which spread over Farley's clean-shaven countenance by the third day was now replaced by a scrawny beard. It gave the finishing touch to his wild appearance.

As evening approached, Khalla gave him to understand the need of caution. Niringai's men might be prowling in the hills; they were in constant danger of discovery. At twilight, Khalla left him in hiding, in order to reconnoiter. The moon was rising when she returned.

"The king is angry. You are not afraid, *birahi*?"

"Show me the way," said Farley with a trace of impatience.

Khalla led him by a circuitous path to the rear of the village. The moon, clear and of tropical whiteness, brought out in fair detail the clump of huts which ranged about Niringai's. Excepting for a light breeze the scene was quiet. There were no lights in the huts as far as he could detect.

"Come," whispered Khalla.

On tiptoe they crept to the huts. Evidently, Niringai felt no need for sentinels. Cautiously they approached the abode of King Niringai. All was quiet therein. The only sound was the faint lisp of palmetto leaves which stirred in the thatchery of the roof.

Khalla put her finger to her lips. Farley crouched low as they circled the corner of the hut. Khalla entered and raised her voice:

"Mongoose—no longer a king—"

A footfall sounded behind him, and Farley turned to be confronted by a headman carrying a spear. The Malay's face was distended with astonishment. Farley recovered himself, forgetting the knife at his belt, and dashed at the headman.

In the short struggle he tore the spear from the Malay's hands and, forgetting all of his carefully laid plans for vengeance, delivered himself of a vigorous uppercut with his left fist. The headman sank to the ground with a sob of righteous surprise.

Another of Niringai's warriors appeared unarmed—a third—a fourth. He was outnumbered, but not outmaneuvered. A great deal of the skill that he had acquired during his sophomore year still remained behind those large fists.

Headmen came—and headmen fell. There was a great confusion of arms, bodies, legs, and spears. But the fight was Farley's fight, and he drove his huge fists as if they were steam pistons.

In a lull, Khalla ran to his side from Niringai's hut.

"*Birahi*—the knife!" she gasped.

"My belt," he shouted, and he felt her fingers groping for the sheath as another warrior, with the sleep still in his bewildered little eyes, fought his way in.

The fight was beginning to tell on Jack Farley. His back was against the hut wall. His cheek was bleeding from a spear thrust. His breath was coming and going in exhausted gasps. But he crouched and waited for the next antagonist.

Suddenly the Malays drew back. Farley was at a loss to account for the look of horror that the moonlight showed creeping over their faces. Out of the corner of his eye he glimpsed Khalla, and understood.

In her right hand she clutched the knife, dripping with a dark liquid. In her left, raised defiantly aloft, was a curling, bristling black tuft of hair. She ranged herself excitedly beside Farley.

"Down—down—faithless ones!" she screamed.

To a man, the Malays threw themselves on the ground, moaning and sobbing.

"The—red—god—is—king!" she cried. "N'r'r'ing-i-ii—the mongoose—is dead! *Birahi*," she gasped, "I killed him. Khalla killed the mongoose!"

Farley dropped his hand weakly on her shoulder and smiled.

"Half of my kingdom is yours, Khalla." Khalla drew away from him as if hurt.

"What is mine—is yours, *birahi*; but what is yours—is yours only!"

XII.

THE rescue party, consisting of Terrence Larkin, Edith Burrell and fourteen well armed Malay hunters, wearily climbed the slope of Mount Suma, grimly vowing (at least Larkin vowed it) that if the world were peopled with fewer reckless spirits such as Jack Farley, it would be a much pleasanter place in which to reside.

After Farley's triumphant departure, the thought had commenced to gnaw at Edith that the adventurer would in all probability fall into unkind hands. Even if he succeeded in reaching Mount Suma and the hut of Niringai, dangers would beset him, she argued.

The same thought weighted the conscience of Terrence Larkin, too; his only reluctance in starting immediately being due to the pending arrival of the Tjibotas, and he was anxious for news from Luciana.

The rescue party followed two days behind Jack Farley. It was on the evening of the second day following his preemption of the throne of Niringai that they surrounded the mountain village, and dropped a 30-30 rifle bullet into his front-door yard, as a signal to the king that resistance was useless.

Khalla was sitting cross-legged in the doorway listening to him as he plied questions to three of the youngest headmen on

points that he did not comprehend. The whine and spat of the bullet as it ricocheted from the boulder and spun away down into the valley brought the conversation to an abrupt end.

Curiously, Khalla studied the group climbing the hillside. An angry look came into her eyes as she made out the figure of Edith.

As Farley strode to the doorway, Edith caught sight of him. With a squeal of delight she raced up the hill. He ran out to meet her, ignoring the crouching figure of Khalla, and swept her into his arms. Edith ran her fingers through his hair tenderly.

"I was so afraid!" she sobbed, as he drew her more fiercely to him.

Terrence Larkin laid a heavy hand on Farley's shoulder.

"Young man," he exclaimed sternly. "Isn't it about time for this nonsense to be done with? Where is King Niringai?"

"The king is dead, Terry; and I just naturally elected myself to fill his shoes!"

"Jack, did you kill him?"

"Not on your life! The queerest—well, the most amazing girl I ever knew in my life took charge of that. I want you to meet her—you, too, Edith. She's a little outlaw of the jungle, a real pagan. Had some sort of grudge against old N'r'r'ing-i-ii—called him the mongoose. Wait. Khalla! *Aie, chaya-mata*, where are you hiding? Your king demands that you approach!" This last in Malay.

Khalla crept to his side from the doorway of Niringai's hut, where she had been standing with jealous eyes, and dropped down on her knees before him.

Edith reached out her hand, smiling, but Khalla drew away stiffly.

Farley grinned.

"Khalla is a little timid. *Chaya-mata*," he added in Malay, directing himself to Khalla, "see to the white woman's needs while I am gone."

He climbed up the hill with Larkin.

"Terry, I can hardly keep the good news out of my system. Look upon the future camphor king of all Java. I've found it—struck it rich! I've just had my head hunters in executive conference, and we've decided to stop hunting heads for-

ever. That low shanty we're approaching is an ancient storehouse for scalps. Tomorrow those scalps are going to be cleaned out. Camphor-tree chips are going in instead.

"Did you ever hear of Barus, or Dryobalanops, camphor? We have it on Mount Suma in abundance, Terry. Those trees on the lower slope are dripping with it. Next week the warriors of Suma will be equipped with improvised camphor axes—I will borrow them from your storehouse. Now, while you're inspecting this very interesting scalp-shed, pardon me while I return and pay my respects to Edith. Why, Terry; my God!"

Farley descended the slope to the place where he had left Khalla and Edith, with strides of terror. Lying on her back, her hair flowing in a torrent on the dry grass of the mountainside, was Edith.

Khalla, with her lips drawn back in a vengeful sneer, knelt above her, a long thin knife flashing in her hand. Both of Edith's hands were gripped about Khalla's right wrist in a mighty effort to prevent the steel from plunging into her breast or throat.

Disregarding the danger of sharp edged rock outcroppings and of deceiving footholds, Farley darted toward them, panting noisily, his eyes seeming to bulge as they stared at the upheld dagger.

The look of animal rage increased on Khalla's face. Her half closed eyes seemed to be burning.

Farley dashed to their side, struck the dagger from Khalla's hand and drew her upward by her hair until he could look squarely into her face.

The look of rage melted from Khalla's face as she saw the expression with which Farley was staring at her. It was a look that Khalla had never seen in his face before.

It was fear!

And she knew that Farley was no coward. Once in the jungle she had seen a snake strike at his foot, and she had studied his expression eagerly; but there had been no trace of fear then.

It came to Khalla as she stared back into his eyes, while her head lay for the first

and last time on his arm, that his expression was not fear of her or her dagger, but fear for the white woman—fear for one that he loved. Such fear had never come under Khalla's observation before.

She turned her head away, and he released her. When Farley pointed down the hillside, Khalla drew herself up to full height and nodded slowly—twice. Her face wore no expression now. The dark blue powder of night was settling more thickly. Khalla was soon lost in it.

Later in the evening, Larkin had occasion to overhear Edith's whisper: "Are you really sure?" and Farley's reply: "You've been my queen from the day I saw you on the pier at Sourabaya!"

Meanwhile, the drooping figure of Khalla continued in slow descent down the steepest side of Mount Suma. The moon had set and the skyline was rosy when she jumped from the final ledge upon the rolling coral beach.

Months, or years, had elapsed since she had been carried half unconscious from the canoe. She looked for it. High up on the beach, dim outlines in the gathering day, she found it. Both booms were warped. The hull was misshapen but still intact.

The strength of poignant grief enabled her to drag the smallboat to the water's edge. From her blouse she removed a number of oranges, mangustas, and guavas and laid them in the canoe.

Then she looked long and thoughtfully up the steep side of Mount Suma, as she pushed the canoe noiselessly away from the beach. The outrigger drifted out slowly with the tide. Khalla, kneeling in the bottom, seemed to droop more and more as her eyes continued to seek out the summit of the mountain. But her eyes were dry, only her lips revealing her disappointment.

As the drifting current gently nosed the canoe seaward, the look on Khalla's face changed to one of mystery and wonder.

She removed from her blouse what appeared to be a tuft of short, black hair. It was dry, crackling softly in her fingers.

With a curt toss of her head, she flung it freely—saw it float an instant—and sink.

"All kings—all gods—all men," sighed Khalla, lifting the paddle.