

THE HAND OF THE MANDARIN QUONG

Sax Rohmer

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THE HAND OF THE MANDARIN QUONG

Sax Rohmer

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I. THE SHADOW ON THE CURTAIN

"Singapore is by no means herself again," declared Jennings, looking about the lounge of the Hotel de l'Europe. "Don't you agree, Knox?"

Burton fixed his lazy stare upon the speaker.

"Don't blame poor old Singapore," he said. "There is no spot in this battered world that I have succeeded in discovering which is not changed for the worse."

Dr. Matheson flicked ash from his cigar and smiled in that peculiarly happy manner which characterizes a certain American type and which lent a boyish charm to his personality.

"You are a pair of pessimists," he pronounced. "For some reason best known to themselves Jennings and Knox have decided upon a Busman's Holiday. Very well. Why grumble?"

"You are quite right, Doctor," Jennings admitted. "When I was on service here in the Straits Settlements I declared heaven knows how often that the country would never see me again once I was demobbed. Yet here you see I am; Burton belongs here; but here's Knox, and we are all as fed up as we can be!"

"Yes," said Burton slowly. "I may be a bit tired of Singapore. It's a queer thing, though, that you fellows have drifted back here again. The call of the East is no fable. It's a call that one hears for ever."

The conversation drifted into another channel, and all sorts of topics were discussed, from racing to the latest feminine fashions, from ballroom dances to the merits and demerits of coalition government. Then suddenly:

"What became of Adderley?" asked Jennings.

There were several men in the party who had been cronies of ours during the time that we were stationed in Singapore, and at Jennings's words a sort of hush seemed to fall on those who had known Adderley. I cannot say if Jennings noticed this, but it was perfectly evident to me that Dr. Matheson had perceived it, for he glanced

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swiftly across in my direction in an oddly significant way.

"I don't know," replied Burton, who was an engineer. "He was rather an unsavoury sort of character in some ways, but I heard that he came to a sticky end."

"What do you mean?" I asked with curiosity, for I myself had often wondered what had become of Adderley.

"Well, he was reported to his C. O., or something, wasn't he, just before the time for his demobilization? I don't know the particulars; I thought perhaps you did, as he was in your regiment."

"I have heard nothing whatever about it," I replied.

"You mean Sidney Adderley, the man who was so indecently rich?" someone interjected. "Had a place at Katong, and was always talking about his father's millions?"

"That's the fellow."

"Yes," said Jennings, "there was some scandal, I know, but it was after my time here."

"Something about an old mandarin out Johore Bahru way, was it not?" asked Burton. "The last thing I heard about Adderley was that he had disappeared."

"Nobody would have cared much if he had," declared Jennings. "I know of several who would have been jolly glad. There was a lot of the brute about Adderley, apart from the fact that he had more money than was good for him. His culture was a veneer. It was his check-book that spoke all the time."

"Everybody would have forgiven Adderley his vulgarity," said Dr. Matheson, quietly, "if the man's heart had been in the right place."

"Surely an instance of trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," someone murmured.

Burton gazed rather hard at the last speaker.

"So far as I am aware," he said, "the poor devil is dead, so go easy."

"Are you sure he is dead?" asked Dr. Matheson, glancing at Burton in that quizzical, amused way of his.

"No, I am not sure; I am merely speaking from hearsay. And now I come to think of it, the information was rather vague. But I gathered that he had vanished, at any rate, and remembering certain earlier episodes in his career, I was led to suppose that this vanishing meant "

He shrugged his shoulders significantly.

"You mean the old mandarin?" suggested Dr. Matheson.

"Yes."

"Was there really anything in that story, or was it suggested by the unpleasant reputation of Adderley?" Jennings asked.

"I can settle any doubts upon that point," said I; whereupon I immediately became a focus of general attention.

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"What! were you ever at that place of Adderley's at Katong?" asked Jennings with intense curiosity.

I nodded, lighting a fresh cigarette in a manner that may have been unduly leisurely.

"Did you see her?"

Again I nodded.

"Really!"

"I must have been peculiarly favoured, but certainly I had that pleasure."

"You speak of seeing her" said one of the party, now entering the conversation for the first time. "To whom do you refer?"

"Well," replied Burton, "it's really a sort of fairy tale unless Knox" glancing across in my direction "can confirm it. But there was a story current during the latter part of Adderley's stay in Singapore to the effect that he had made the acquaintance of the wife, or some member of the household, of an old gentleman out Johore Bahru way sort of mandarin or big pot among the Chinks."

"It was rumoured that he had bolted with her," added another speaker.

"I think it was more than a rumour."

"Why do you say so?"

"Well, representations were made to the authorities, I know for an absolute certainty, and I have an idea that Adderley was kicked out of the Service as a consequence of the scandal which resulted."

"How is it one never heard of this?"

"Money speaks, my dear fellow," cried Burton, "even when it is possessed by such a peculiar outsider as Adderley. The thing was hushed up. It was a very nasty business. But Knox was telling us that he had actually seen the lady. Please carry on, Knox, for I must admit that I am intensely curious."

"I can only say that I saw her on one occasion."

"With Adderley?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Where?"

"At his place at Katong."

"I even thought his place at that resort was something of a myth," declared Jennings. "He never asked me to go there, but, then, I took that as a compliment. Pardon the apparent innuendo, Knox," he added, laughing. "But you say you actually visited the establishment?"

"Yes," I replied slowly, "I met him here in this very hotel one evening in the winter of '15, after the natives' attempt to mutiny. He had been drinking rather heavily, a fact which he was quite unable to disguise. He was

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never by any means a real friend of mine; in fact, I doubt that he had a true friend in the world. Anyhow, I could see that he was lonely, and as I chanced to be at a loose end I accepted an invitation to go over to what he termed his 'little place at Katong.'

"His little place proved to be a veritable palace. The man privately, or rather, secretly, to be exact, kept up a sort of pagan state. He had any number of servants. Of course he became practically a millionaire after the death of his father, as you will remember; and given more congenial company, I must confess that I might have spent a most enjoyable evening there. "Adderley insisted upon priming me with champagne, and after a while I may as well admit that I lost something of my former reserve, and began in a fashion to feel that I was having a fairly good time. By the way, my host was not quite frankly drunk. He got into that objectionable and dangerous mood which some of you will recall, and I could see by the light in his eyes that there was mischief brewing, although at the time I did not know its nature.

"I should explain that we were amusing ourselves in a room which was nearly as large as the lounge of this hotel, and furnished in a somewhat similar manner. There were carved pillars and stained glass domes, a little fountain, and all those other peculiarities of an Eastern household.

"Presently, Adderley gave an order to one of his servants, and glanced at me with that sort of mocking, dare-devil look in his eyes which I loathed, which everybody loathed who ever met the man. Of course I had no idea what all this portended, but I was very shortly to learn.

"While he was still looking at me, but stealing side-glances at a doorway before which was draped a most wonderful curtain of a sort of flamingo colour, this curtain was suddenly pulled aside, and a girl came in.

"Of course, you must remember that at the time of which I am speaking the scandal respecting the mandarin had not yet come to light. Consequently I had no idea who the girl could be. I saw she was a Eurasian. But of her striking beauty there could be no doubt whatever. She was dressed in magnificent robes, and she literally glittered with jewels. She even wore jewels upon the toes of her little bare feet. But the first thing that struck me at the moment of her appearance was that her presence there was contrary to her wishes and inclinations. I have never seen a similar expression in any woman's eyes. She looked at Adderley as though she would gladly have slain him!

"Seeing this look, his mocking smile in which there was something of triumph of the joy of possession turned to a scowl of positive brutality. He clenched his fists in a way that set me bristling. He advanced toward the girl and although the width of the room divided them, she recoiled and the significance of expression and gesture was unmistakable. Adderley paused.

"'So you have made up your mind to dance after all?' he shouted.

"The look in the girl's dark eyes was pitiful, and she turned to me with a glance of dumb entreaty.

"'No, no!' she cried. 'No, no! Why do you bring me here?'

"'Dance!' roared Adderley. 'Dance! That's what I want you to do.'

"Rebellion leapt again to the wonderful eyes, and she started back with a perfectly splendid gesture of defiance. At that my brutal and drunken host leapt in her direction. I was on my feet now, but before I could act the girl said a thing which checked him, sobered him, which pulled him up short, as though he had encountered a stone wall.

"'Ah, God!' she said. (She was speaking, of course, in her native tongue.) 'His hand! His hand! Look! His hand!'

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"To me her words were meaningless, naturally, but following the direction of her positively agonized glance I saw that she was watching what seemed to me to be the shadow of someone moving behind the flame-like curtain which produced an effect not unlike that of a huge, outstretched hand, the fingers crooked, claw-fashion.

"Knox, Knox!" whispered Adderley, grasping me by the shoulder.

"He pointed with a quivering finger toward this indistinct shadow upon the curtain, and:

"Do you see it do you see it?" he said huskily. 'It is his hand it is his hand!'

"Of the pair, I think, the man was the more frightened. But the girl, uttering a frightful shriek, ran out of the room as though pursued by a demon. As she did so whoever had been moving behind the curtain evidently went away. The shadow disappeared, and Adderley, still staring as if hypnotized at the spot where it had been, continued to hold my shoulder as in a vise. Then, sinking down upon a heap of cushions beside me, he loudly and shakily ordered more champagne.

"Utterly mystified by the incident, I finally left him in a state of stupor, and returned to my quarters, wondering whether I had dreamed half of the episode or the whole of it, whether he did really possess that wonderful palace, or whether he had borrowed it to impress me."

I ceased speaking, and my story was received in absolute silence, until:

"And that is all you know?" said Burton.

"Absolutely all. I had to leave about that time, you remember, and afterward went to France."

"Yes, I remember. It was while you were away that the scandal arose respecting the mandarin. Extraordinary story, Knox. I should like to know what it all meant, and what the end of it was."

Dr. Matheson broke his long silence.

"Although I am afraid I cannot enlighten you respecting the end of the story," he said quietly, "perhaps I can carry it a step further."

"Really, Doctor? What do you know about the matter?"

"I accidentally became implicated as follows," replied the American: "I was, as you know, doing voluntary surgical work near Singapore at the time, and one evening, presumably about the same period of which Knox is speaking, I was returning from the hospital at Katong, at which I acted sometimes as anaesthetist, to my quarters in Singapore; just drifting along, leisurely by the edge of the gardens admiring the beauty of the mangroves and the deceitful peace of the Eastern night.

"The hour was fairly late and not a soul was about. Nothing disturbed the silence except those vague sibilant sounds which are so characteristic of the country. Presently, as I rambled on with my thoughts wandering back to the dim ages, I literally fell over a man who lay in the road.

"I was naturally startled, but I carried an electric pocket torch, and by its light I discovered that the person over whom I had fallen was a dignified-looking Chinaman, somewhat past middle age. His clothes, which were of good quality, were covered with dirt and blood, and he bore all the appearance of having recently been engaged in a very tough struggle. His face was notable only for its possession of an unusually long jet-black moustache. He had swooned from loss of blood."

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"Why, was he wounded?" exclaimed Jennings.

"His hand had been nearly severed from his wrist!"

"Merciful heavens!"

"I realized the impossibility of carrying him so far as the hospital, and accordingly I extemporized a rough tourniquet and left him under a palm tree by the road until I obtained assistance. Later, at the hospital, following a consultation, we found it necessary to amputate."

"I should say he objected fiercely?"

"He was past objecting to anything, otherwise I have no doubt he would have objected furiously. The index finger of the injured hand had one of those preternaturally long nails, protected by an engraved golden case. However, at least I gave him a chance of life. He was under my care for some time, but I doubt if ever he was properly grateful. He had an iron constitution, though, and I finally allowed him to depart. One queer stipulation he had made that the severed hand, with its golden nail-case, should be given to him when he left hospital. And this bargain I faithfully carried out."

"Most extraordinary," I said. "Did you ever learn the identity of the old gentleman?"

"He was very reticent, but I made a number of inquiries, and finally learned with absolute certainty, I think, that he was the Mandarin Quong Mi Su from Johore Bahru, a person of great repute among the Chinese there, and rather a big man in China. He was known locally as the Mandarin Quong."

"Did you learn anything respecting how he had come by his injury, Doctor?"

Matheson smiled in his quiet fashion, and selected a fresh cigar with great deliberation. Then:

"I suppose it is scarcely a case of betraying a professional secret," he said, "but during the time that my patient was recovering from the effects of the anaesthetic he unconsciously gave me several clues to the nature of the episode. Putting two and two together I gathered that someone, although the name of this person never once passed the lips of the mandarin, had abducted his favourite wife."

"Good heavens! truly amazing," I exclaimed.

"Is it not? How small a place the world is. My old mandarin had traced the abductor and presumably the girl to some house which I gathered to be in the neighbourhood of Katong. In an attempt to force an entrance doubtless with the amiable purpose of slaying them both he had been detected by the prime object of his hatred. In hurriedly descending from a window he had been attacked by some weapon, possibly a sword, and had only made good his escape in the condition in which I found him. How far he had proceeded I cannot say, but I should imagine that the house to which he had been was no great distance from the spot where I found him."

"Comment is really superfluous," remarked Burton. "He was looking for Adderley."

"I agree," said Jennings.

"And," I added, "it was evidently after this episode that I had the privilege of visiting that interesting establishment."

There was a short interval of silence; then:

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"You probably retain no very clear impression of the shadow which you saw," said Dr. Matheson, with great deliberation. "At the time perhaps you had less occasion particularly to study it. But are you satisfied that it was really caused by someone moving behind the curtain?"

I considered his question for a few moments.

"I am not," I confessed. "Your story, Doctor, makes me wonder whether it may not have been due to something else."

"What else can it have been due to?" exclaimed Jennings contemptuously "unless to the champagne?"

"I won't quote Shakespeare," said Dr. Matheson, smiling in his odd way. "The famous lines, though appropriate, are somewhat overworked. But I will quote Kipling: 'East is East, and West is West.'"

II. THE LADY OF KATONG

Fully six months had elapsed, and on returning from Singapore I had forgotten all about Adderley and the unsavoury stories connected with his reputation. Then, one evening as I was strolling aimlessly along St. James's Street, wondering how I was going to kill time for almost everyone I knew was out of town, including Paul Harley, and London can be infinitely more lonely under such conditions than any desert I saw a thick-set figure approaching along the other side of the street.

The swing of the shoulders, the aggressive turn of the head, were vaguely familiar, and while I was searching my memory and endeavouring to obtain a view of the man's face, he stared across in my direction.

It was Adderley.

He looked even more debauched than I remembered him, for whereas in Singapore he had had a tanned skin, now he looked unhealthily pallid and blotchy. He raised his hand, and:

"Knox!" he cried, and ran across to greet me.

His boisterous manner and a sort of coarse geniality which he possessed had made him popular with a certain set in former days, but I, who knew that this geniality was forced, and assumed to conceal a sort of appalling animalism, had never been deceived by it. Most people found Adderley out sooner or later, but I had detected the man's true nature from the very beginning. His eyes alone were danger signals for any amateur psychologist. However, I greeted him civilly enough:

"Bless my soul, you are looking as fit as a fiddle!" he cried. "Where have you been, and what have you been doing since I saw you last?"

"Nothing much," I replied, "beyond trying to settle down in a reformed world."

"Reformed world!" echoed Adderley. "More like a ruined world it has seemed to me."

He laughed loudly. That he had already explored several bottles was palpable.

We were silent for a while, mentally weighing one another up, as it were. Then:

"Are you living in town?" asked Adderley.

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"I am staying at the Carlton at the moment," I replied. "My chambers are in the hands of the decorators. It's awkward. Interferes with my work."

"Work!" cried Adderley. "Work! It's a nasty word, Knox. Are you doing anything now?"

"Nothing, until eight o'clock, when I have an appointment."

"Come along to my place," he suggested, "and have a cup of tea, or a whisky and soda if you prefer it."

Probably I should have refused, but even as he spoke I was mentally translated to the lounge of the Hotel de l'Europe, and prompted by a very human curiosity I determined to accept his invitation. I wondered if Fate had thrown an opportunity in my way of learning the end of the peculiar story which had been related on that occasion.

I accompanied Adderley to his chambers, which were within a stone's throw of the spot where I had met him. That this gift for making himself unpopular with all and sundry, high and low, had not deserted him, was illustrated by the attitude of the liftman as we entered the hall of the chambers. He was barely civil to Adderley and even regarded myself with marked disfavour.

We were admitted by Adderley's man, whom I had not seen before, but who was some kind of foreigner, I think a Portuguese. It was characteristic of Adderley. No Englishman would ever serve him for long, and there had been more than one man in his old Company who had openly avowed his intention of dealing with Adderley on the first available occasion.

His chambers were ornately furnished; indeed, the room in which we sat more closely resembled a scene from an Oscar Asche production than a normal man's study. There was something unreal about it all. I have since thought that this unreality extended to the person of the man himself. Grossly material, he yet possessed an aura of mystery, mystery of an unsavoury sort. There was something furtive, secretive, about Adderley's entire mode of life.

I had never felt at ease in his company, and now as I sat staring wonderingly at the strange and costly ornaments with which the room was overlaid I bethought me of the object of my visit. How I should have brought the conversation back to our Singapore days I know not, but a suitable opening was presently offered by Adderley himself.

"Do you ever see any of the old gang?" he inquired.

"I was in Singapore about six months ago," I replied, "and I met some of them again."

"What! Had they drifted back to the East after all?"

"Two or three of them were taking what Dr. Matheson described as a Busman's Holiday."

At mention of Dr. Matheson's name Adderley visibly started.

"So you know Matheson," he murmured. "I didn't know you had ever met him."

Plainly to hide his confusion he stood up, and crossing the room drew my attention to a rather fine silver bowl of early Persian ware. He was displaying its peculiar virtues and showing a certain acquaintance with his subject when he was interrupted. A door opened suddenly and a girl came in. Adderley put down the bowl and turned rapidly as I rose from my seat.

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It was the lady of Katong!

I recognized her at once, although she wore a very up-to-date gown. While it did not suit her dark good looks so well as the native dress which she had worn at Singapore, yet it could not conceal the fact that in a barbaric way she was a very beautiful woman. On finding a visitor in the room she became covered with confusion.

"Oh," she said, speaking in Hindustani. "Why did you not tell me there was someone here?"

Adderley's reply was characteristically brutal.

"Get out," he said. "You fool."

I turned to go, for I was conscious of an intense desire to attack my host. But:

"Don't go, Knox, don't go!" he cried. "I am sorry, I am damned sorry, I "

He paused, and looked at me in a queer sort of appealing way. The girl, her big eyes widely open, retreated again to the door, with curious lithe steps, characteristically Oriental. The door regained, she paused for a moment and extended one small hand in Adderley's direction.

"I hate you," she said slowly, "hate you! Hate you!"

She went out, quietly closing the door behind her. Adderley turned to me with an embarrassed laugh.

"I know you think I am a brute and an outsider," he said, "and perhaps I am. Everybody says I am, so I suppose there must be something in it. But if ever a man paid for his mistakes I have paid for mine, Knox. Good God, I haven't a friend in the world."

"You probably don't deserve one," I retorted.

"I know I don't, and that's the tragedy of it," he replied. "You may not believe it, Knox; I don't expect anybody to believe me; but for more than a year I have been walking on the edge of Hell. Do you know where I have been since I saw you last?"

I shook my head in answer.

"I have been half round the world, Knox, trying to find peace."

"You don't know where to look for it," I said.

"If only you knew," he whispered. "If only you knew," and sank down upon the settee, ruffling his hair with his hands and looking the picture of haggard misery. Seeing that I was still set upon departure:

"Hold on a bit, Knox," he implored. "Don't go yet. There is something I want to ask you, something very important."

He crossed to a sideboard and mixed himself a stiff whisky-and-soda. He asked me to join him, but I refused.

"Won't you sit down again?"

I shook my head.

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"You came to my place at Katong once," he began abruptly. "I was damned drunk, I admit it. But something happened, do you remember?"

I nodded.

"This is what I want to ask you: Did you, or did you not, see that shadow?"

I stared him hard in the face.

"I remember the episode to which you refer," I replied. "I certainly saw a shadow."

"But what sort of shadow?"

"To me it seemed an indefinite, shapeless thing, as though caused by someone moving behind the curtain."

"It didn't look to you like the shadow of a hand?"

"It might have been, but I could not be positive."

Adderley groaned.

"Knox," he said, "money is a curse. It has been a curse to me. If I have had my fun, God knows I have paid for it."

"Your idea of fun is probably a peculiar one," I said dryly.

Let me confess that I was only suffering the man's society because of an intense curiosity which now possessed me on learning that the lady of Katong was still in Adderley's company.

Whether my repugnance for his society would have enabled me to remain any longer I cannot say. But as if Fate had deliberately planned that I should become a witness of the concluding phases of this secret drama, we were now interrupted a second time, and again in a dramatic fashion.

Adderley's nondescript valet came in with letters and a rather large brown paper parcel sealed and fastened with great care.

As the man went out:

"Surely that is from Singapore," muttered Adderley, taking up the parcel.

He seemed to become temporarily oblivious of my presence, and his face grew even more haggard as he studied the writing upon the wrapper. With unsteady fingers he untied it, and I lingered, watching curiously. Presently out from the wrappings he took a very beautiful casket of ebony and ivory, cunningly carved and standing upon four claw-like ivory legs.

"What the devil's this?" he muttered.

He opened the box, which was lined with sandal-wood, and thereupon started back with a great cry, recoiling from the casket as though it had contained an adder. My former sentiments forgotten, I stepped forward and peered into the interior. Then I, in turn, recoiled.

In the box lay a shrivelled yellow hand with long tapering and well-manicured nails neatly severed at the wrist!

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The nail of the index finger was enclosed in a tiny, delicately fashioned case of gold, upon which were engraved a number of Chinese characters.

Adderley sank down again upon the settee.

"My God!" he whispered, "his hand! His hand! He has sent me his hand!"

He began laughing. Whereupon, since I could see that the man was practically hysterical because of his mysterious fears:

"Stop that," I said sharply. "Pull yourself together, Adderley. What the deuce is the matter with you?"

"Take it away!" he moaned, "take it away. Take the accursed thing away!"

"I admit it is an unpleasant gift to send to anybody," I said, "but probably you know more about it than I do."

"Take it away," he repeated. "Take it away, for God's sake, take it away, Knox!"

He was quite beyond reason, and therefore:

"Very well," I said, and wrapped the casket in the brown paper in which it had come. "What do you want me to do with it?"

"Throw it in the river," he answered. "Burn it. Do anything you like with it, but take it out of my sight!"

III. THE GOLD-CASED NAIL

As I descended to the street the liftman regarded me in a curious and rather significant way. Finally, just as I was about to step out into the hall:

"Excuse me, sir," he said, having evidently decided that I was a fit person to converse with, "but are you a friend of Mr. Adderley's?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, sir, I hope you will excuse me, but at times I have thought the gentleman was just a little bit queer, like."

"You mean insane?" I asked sharply.

"Well, sir, I don't know, but he is always asking me if I can see shadows and things in the lift, and sometimes when he comes in late of a night he absolutely gives me the cold shivers, he does."

I lingered, the box under my arm, reluctant to obtain confidences from a servant, but at the same time keenly interested. Thus encouraged:

"Then there's that lady friend of his who is always coming here," the man continued. "She's haunted by shadows, too." He paused, watching me narrowly.

"There's nothing better in this world than a clean conscience, sir," he concluded.

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Having returned to my room at the hotel, I set down the mysterious parcel, surveying it with much disfavour. That it contained the hand of the Mandarin Quong I could not doubt, the hand which had been amputated by Dr. Matheson. Its appearance in that dramatic fashion confirmed Matheson's idea that the mandarin's injury had been received at the hands of Adderley. What did all this portend, unless that the Mandarin Quong was dead? And if he were dead why was Adderley more afraid of him dead than he had been of him living?

I thought of the haunting shadow, I thought of the night at Katong, and I thought of Dr. Matheson's words when he had told us of his discovery of the Chinaman lying in the road that night outside Singapore.

I felt strangely disinclined to touch the relic, and it was only after some moments' hesitation that I undid the wrappings and raised the lid of the casket. Dusk was very near and I had not yet lighted the lamps; therefore at first I doubted the evidence of my senses. But having lighted up and peered long and anxiously into the sandal-wood lining of the casket I could doubt no longer.

The casket was empty!

It was like a conjuring trick. That the hand had been in the box when I had taken it up from Adderley's table I could have sworn before any jury. When and by whom it had been removed was a puzzle beyond my powers of unravelling. I stepped toward the telephone and then remembered that Paul Harley was out of London. Vaguely wondering if Adderley had played me a particularly gruesome practical joke, I put the box on a sideboard and again contemplated the telephone doubtfully for a moment. It was in my mind to ring him up. Finally, taking all things into consideration, I determined that I would have nothing further to do with the man's unsavoury and mysterious affairs.

It was in vain, however, that I endeavoured to dismiss the matter from my mind; and throughout the evening, which I spent at a theatre with some American friends, I found myself constantly thinking of Adderley and the ivory casket, of the mandarin of Johore Bahru, and of the mystery of the shrivelled yellow hand.

I had been back in my room about half an hour, I suppose, and it was long past midnight, when I was startled by a ringing of my telephone bell. I took up the receiver, and:

"Knox! Knox!" came a choking cry.

"Yes, who is speaking?"

"It is I, Adderley. For God's sake come round to my place at once!"

His words were scarcely intelligible. Undoubtedly he was in the grip of intense emotion.

"What do you mean? What is the matter?"

"It is here, Knox, it is here! It is knocking on the door! Knocking! Knocking!"

"You have been drinking," I said sternly. "Where is your man?"

"The cur has bolted. He bolted the moment he heard that damned knocking. I am all alone; I have no one else to appeal to." There came a choking sound, then: "My God, Knox, it is getting in! I can see. . . the shadow on the blind. . ."

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Convinced that Adderley's secret fears had driven him mad, I nevertheless felt called upon to attend to his urgent call, and without a moment's delay I hurried around to St. James's Street. The liftman was not on duty, the lower hall was in darkness, but I raced up the stairs and found to my astonishment that Adderley's door was wide open.

"Adderley!" I cried. "Adderley!"

There was no reply, and without further ceremony I entered and searched the chambers. They were empty. Deeply mystified, I was about to go out again when there came a ring at the door—bell. I walked to the door and a policeman was standing upon the landing.

"Good evening, sir," he said, and then paused, staring at me curiously.

"Good evening, constable," I replied.

"You are not the gentleman who ran out awhile ago," he said, a note of suspicion coming into his voice.

I handed him my card and explained what had occurred, then:

"It must have been Mr. Adderley I saw," muttered the constable.

"You saw when?"

"Just before you arrived, sir. He came racing out into St. James's Street and dashed off like a madman."

"In which direction was he going?"

"Toward Pall Mall."

The neighbourhood was practically deserted at that hour. But from the guard on duty before the palace we obtained our first evidence of Adderley's movements. He had raced by some five minutes before, frantically looking back over his shoulder and behaving like a man flying for his life. No one else had seen him. No one else ever did see him alive. At two o'clock there was no news, but I had informed Scotland Yard and official inquiries had been set afoot.

Nothing further came to light that night, but as all readers of the daily press will remember, Adderley's body was taken out of the pond in St. James's Park on the following day. Death was due to drowning, but his throat was greatly discoloured as though it had been clutched in a fierce grip.

It was I who identified the body, and as many people will know, in spite of the closest inquiries, the mystery of Adderley's death has not been properly cleared up to this day. The identity of the lady who visited him at his chambers was never discovered. She completely disappeared.

The ebony and ivory casket lies on my table at this present moment, visible evidence of an invisible menace from which Adderley had fled around the world.

Doubtless the truth will never be known now. A significant discovery, however, was made some days after the recovery of Adderley's body.

THE HAND OF THE MANDARIN QUONG

From the bottom of the pond in St. James's Park a patient Scotland Yard official brought up the gold nail–case with its mysterious engravings and it contained, torn at the root, the incredibly long finger–nail of the Mandarin Quong!