

21 - The Power of the Priestess

Facing a sleepless night, Albert Werper is consumed by thoughts of Jane Clayton, particularly jealous of Mohammed Beyd's interest in her. Imagining himself as her protector and suitor, he decides to act upon his desires. The absence of sentries at Jane's tent seems like fate aiding his ill intentions. Inside, he encounters Mohammed Beyd in a compromising position with Jane, igniting a violent confrontation. Overcome by a blend of jealousy and perceived entitlement, Werper physically attacks Mohammed Beyd, resulting in a desperate struggle. Despite initial difficulties with his weapon, Werper manages to shoot Beyd amid the chaos, mistakenly believing he's protecting Jane.

The noise attracts the camp, and Werper quickly fabricates a story to cover his tracks, portraying the act as a tragic outcome of a love-driven conflict involving Beyd, thus manipulating the sentiments of the raiders to avoid immediate suspicion. Werper, addressing Jane with a mixture of newfound respect and a plan for both of them to escape, suggests she feign death to be smuggled out. Despite skepticism, Jane agrees, driven by desperation.

Werper's stratagem surprisingly works on the sentries, leveraging their unanticipated susceptibility to sentimental narratives. Safely away from the camp, he places Jane into a temporary hiding spot in the jungle, promising to return with a more substantial plan for escape. Meanwhile, he orchestrates the scene to make Beyd's death appear as a suicide, cunningly manipulating the evidence and perceptions back at the camp to secure his own safety temporarily.

Upon discovery of Beyd's "suicide," the camp is thrown into confusion, which Werper uses to his advantage, maintaining a facade of innocence and concern. His actions, though driven by initial self-serving motives, shift toward a semblance of redemption, intending to rescue Jane from the predicament he partly caused. This chapter not only showcases Werper's cunning and adaptability but also sets a foundation for possible redemption, intertwining themes of betrayal, manipulation, and the quest for redemption amidst the backdrop of a jungle fraught with danger and moral ambiguity.