



Charlie Chan, The House without a Key

Earl Derr Biggers

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A selection from CHAPTER I - Kona Weather Miss Minerva Winterslip was a Bostonian in good standing, and long past the romantic age. Yet beauty thrilled her still, even the semi-barbaric beauty of a Pacific island. As she walked slowly along the beach she felt the little catch in her throat that sometimes she had known in Symphony Hall, Boston, when her favorite orchestra rose to some new and unexpected height of loveliness. It was the hour at which she liked Waikiki best, the hour just preceding dinner and the quick tropic darkness. The shadows cast by the tall cocoanut palms lengthened and deepened, the light of the falling sun flamed on Diamond Head and tinted with gold the rollers sweeping in from the coral reef. A few late swimmers, reluctant to depart, dotted those waters whose touch is like the caress of a lover. On the springboard of the nearest float a slim brown girl poised for one delectable instant. What a figure! Miss Minerva, well over fifty herself, felt a mild twinge of envy--youth, youth like an arrow, straight and sure and flying. Like an arrow the slender figure rose, then fell; the perfect dive, silent and clean. Miss Minerva glanced at the face of the man who walked beside her. But Amos Winterslip was oblivious to beauty; he had made that the first rule of his life. Born in the Islands, he had never known the mainland beyond San Francisco. Yet there could be no doubt about it, he was the New England conscience personified--the New England conscience in a white duck suit. "Better turn back, Amos," suggested Miss Minerva. "Your dinner's waiting. Thank you so much." "I'll walk as far as the fence," he said. "When you get tired of Dan and his carryings-on, come to us again. We'll be glad to have you." "That's kind of you," she answered, in her sharp crisp way. "But I really must go home. Grace is worried about me. Of course, she can't understand. And my conduct is scandalous, I admit. I came over to Honolulu for six weeks, and I've been wandering about these islands for ten months." "As long as that?" She nodded. "I can't explain it. Every day I make a solemn vow I'll start packing my trunks--to-morrow." "And to-morrow never comes," said Amos. "You've been taken in by the tropics. Some people are." "Weak people, I presume you mean," snapped Miss Minerva. "Well, I've never been weak. Ask anybody on Beacon Street."

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