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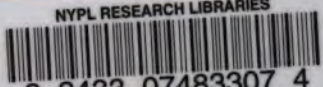
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THE  
YELLOW  
SPIDER

JOHN CHARLES BEECHAM

# 1. Fiction, American



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# **THE YELLOW SPIDER**



# THE YELLOW SPIDER

BY  
JOHN CHARLES BEECHAM

AUTHOR OF  
"THE ARGUS PHEASANT," ETC.



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# THE YELLOW SPIDER



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## CHAPTER I

### EN ROUTE TO BORNEO

THE gray packet headed toward the black and frowning headland that rose to port. There was a faint scraping of chairs on the deck forward and several passengers crowded to the rail. A grim dowager who had been reading the *Manila Press*, ostentatiously challenged a passing ship's officer with the question:

"Are we approaching Cape Kumungun, *mynheer*?"

The sailor bowed punctiliously. "Kaap Kumungun is directly ahead, *madame*," he assured in a strongly Flemish accent, and hurried away.

The dowager glanced at the timepiece she wore pinned to her waist and announced triumphantly, in tones a bit louder than necessary:

"Cape Kumungun at five-thirty, Miss Coston. I win my bet."

Grace Coston did not reply. She was standing at the rail, intently studying the approaching shore through a pair of glasses, and oblivious to all that was occurring about her. The dowager was about to repeat her announcement, when the Yankee trader at her right picked up the *Manila Press* that had fallen to the deck and offered it to her.

"Your paper, I think, Mrs. Derringer."

"Yes! Thank you."

Glancing upward she chanced to notice the Danish



mining engineer at her left, wink covertly at the trader. Her back arched stiffly and she thrust the paper up before her with unnecessary vehemence. The other passengers breathed a sigh of relief. Mrs. Derringer's loquacity had in two days of voyaging made itself painfully obvious to her companions.

Grace Coston put down her marine glasses and sighed tremulously.

"Borneo," she breathed in a half-whisper.

Vincent Brady gazed deeply into the clear blue eyes upturned to meet his. There was admiration in his glance—no man could have looked into Grace Coston's lovely face, fresh as a May morning, and not admire.

"Satisfied?" he bantered. His tone was that of a parent yielding to the whim of a petted child.

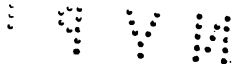
Grace Coston was too full of the ecstasy of the moment to pay heed to his raillery.

"Doesn't it give you a thrill, Vincent?" she cried. "That black immensity over there, outpost of a country big enough to pack several nations of continental Europe into, a country that's almost wholly unexplored jungle, occupied by thousands who have never seen the face of a white man."

They had been an engaged couple practically since leaving New York on this tour around the world, and the pride of possession was beginning to pall on Vincent Brady. Unconsciously he was drifting into the married man's pose and tolerantly humoring ~~ff~~ his *fiancée's* fancies.

"To me," he replied with a judicial air, "it's not much unlike Tierra del Fuego. Or bits of the west coast of Ireland. Or Africa about Algiers."

The cape, in truth, did not have a particularly prepossessing appearance. A long spit of low-lying black rock, over which the Macassar strait swells, shredded themselves into boiling spray, projected like a huge tusk into the sea. Seafowl shrieked discordantly. Far inland there was a slight greenish tint on the horizon, suggestive of the inevitable coco-palm. No sign of human life existed anywhere.



"If you'll let me take those glasses, I may be able to decide the argument," a petulant voice sounded in Grace's ear.

"I beg your pardon, Vi." Grace surrendered the binoculars to her stepmother. Violet Coston accepted them with a languidly graceful movement of her arm that evoked gleams of admiration from others on the deck. She had deep brown eyes that rested upon you appealingly, an exquisitely modeled face, whose pallor was accentuated by her raven hair, and a slight, girlish figure. The latter was her chief charm and made her look even younger than the ruddy cheeked, healthily vital young woman who called her mother by a bit of legal fiction. As a matter of fact, Violet Coston was the elder of the two by three full years—she was twenty-five to Grace's twenty-two.

The packet rushed headlong toward the black escarpment of rock. The huge rollers raised by the steady southeast monsoon accelerated its progress. The towering cliff gained height and awesomeness each moment and disclosed jagged fissures large enough to pocket the little vessel. At its foot the breakers roared, throwing their spume heavenward in futile wrath.

Some of the passengers gazed toward the bridge a little uncertainly. To drive the ship onward on its course seemed like tempting Providence.

On the port side a long, mangy tooth of shale suddenly thrust upward. The surf was boiling and foaming around it. A ship's length ahead, the breakers with a final lunge shoreward, blasted themselves in a salvo of thunders on the impenetrable wall of rock. The mauve of the straits flood became a sickly olive green flecked with lather.

A woman's shrill shriek of alarm rose from the waist where the second-class passengers, native and Chinese, were herded.

"My, God, we're on the rocks!" the Danish mining engineer exclaimed hoarsely. He half-rose from his chair and clung to it, his face chalky white.

Like a bird alarmed as it is about to alight the

packet swung sharply to the right in answer to her helm. There was a moment of suspense, then she slid from the turmoil of foam and whirlpool into water as placid and blue as the heaven above.

The mining engineer fell heavily into his chair. "Damned recklessness!" he gasped weakly, mopping his brow. "Damned recklessness!"

Mrs. Derringer let go the armrests of her chair, which she had been holding in a tense grip, and breathed deeply. The Yankee trader, the most self-possessed member of the group, twinkled humorously as he watched his fellow voyagers.

"Get your goat?" he asked the Dane sympathetically.

"It is risking life!" the latter stormed angrily. "Another minute and we would have been on the rocks."

"They shave it pretty close," the trader agreed. "Got me, too, the first time. You see why they do it, don't you?"

"No, why?"

"There's half a mile of sunken rock on the other side of us," the trader explained, nodding seaward. "The reef runs the deuce of a long way out and the coral keeps growing all the time. It costs coal to steam around it and the only way to dodge it is by this channel. Takes a good man at the wheel, though."

"What is an hour or two hours in comparison with life?" the engineer stormed. "I shall protest to the government."

"Oh, stow it, stow it," the trader advised good-humoredly. "If the poor beggars below can stand it without hollering, we can. The Zuyder Zee makes this trip every three weeks. I guess her navigator knows what he's about."

Further argument was prevented by a low ecstatic cry from Grace Coston.

"Look there!"

"There" was a cluster of Dyak huts set on stilts in the shade of a grove of coco-palms. Two full-grown mias squatted solemnly in front of them. They were chained to stakes and were engaged in breaking co-

conuts by the simple expedient of hammering them together until the shells cracked. They piled the broken coconuts in a little pyramid before them from whence they were taken by Dyak women who removed the meat from the shells and spread it on the mats to dry.

There was silence on the forward deck for several minutes. Each of the passengers was engrossed in drinking in the scene. Grace Coston stood a little apart from the others, next to the rail. She was alone, her stepmother and Vincent Brady had gone below in search of a steward. Her eyes glowed, her cheeks flushed, and her bosom rose and fell rhythmically. One hand tightly gripped the rail, betraying the emotion that filled her.

In a subconscious way she became aware that she was under observation. She turned swiftly. Two men were regarding her, a tall young giant who flushed slightly and turned away under her inquiring glance, and a rather elderly gentleman whose view she was undoubtedly interrupting.

"I beg your pardon," she said, addressing her apology to the elder of the two.

A pair of fine gray eyes were raised to meet her penitent blue ones.

"It really isn't necessary," he replied whimsically. With a droll smile he added: "You see, it's hardly so novel to me as it is to you. There's scarcely a day at this season I don't see the same thing from my own doorstep."

Grace noticed his face, a little seamed with lines, like those of most men who have passed the borderland of fifty, a little sunken, particularly about the cheek-bones, and sallow, rather than healthily tanned. She recognized the marks of malaria. This man had evidently had a hard siege with the dread scourge of the tropics. He had been confined to his cabin since they left Surabaya. A sudden sympathy for him seized her, and she decided to be pleasant.

"The novelty should be wearing off for me," she

replied. "We've done India—two months—Singapore and Java. But somehow it hasn't."

"Borneo makes a powerful appeal," he rejoined quietly.

"It is so terrifically primitive," Grace observed. "And it possesses so much that no other portion of the world has. Inaccessible inlands, unexplored jungles, savage tribes more shy than any in the heart of Africa, and a past evidenced by ruined temples and sunken cities, which is wholly unrevealed to us."

"Yes," the stranger assented, "Borneo is preeminently the land of mystery, the last outpost of heathendom. She will be harder to conquer for Christianity than Africa because in addition to the savagery of the Dark Continent she has the cunning of Asia and the fanaticism of Arabia."

"You are a missionary?" Grace asked.

He smiled. "At Sarawak, yes. My name is John Bright, of the Sarawak British Mission."

"And mine is Grace Coston, of New York," Grace responded, extending her hand in frank comradeship. John Bright belonged to a race of men she admired, men who carried the banner in far places. Her warm handclasp carried a touch of homage.

"Won't you sit down?" the missionary urged politely. He glanced about for a vacant chair. The young man at his right who had gazed at Grace so ardently rose quickly and offered his. As their eyes met a faint flush of color came to his cheek. He turned and strode aft. Grace looked after him with a trace of amusement on her lips.

"I cannot tell you who he is," John Bright vouchsafed, guessing her thoughts. "He is sailing with us as the captain's guest."

"I'm dreadfully afraid I've frightened him away," Grace replied. "I hope I haven't interrupted."

"We were discussing Indian politics," John Bright replied with a smile. "He seems to be as much of an enthusiast about Borneo as you are. That is a remark-

able statement to make about any white man who has spent a number of years here."

"Have you lived in Sarawak a long time?" Grace asked, undesirous of appearing curious about the stranger.

"Thirty-two years," the missionary replied. "Since I was twenty-four. It is a long, long time." He sighed. A strange look flitted across his face and transfigured it. It was as though a mantle of years had dropped off.

"My child," he declared earnestly, "I know just how you feel. Borneo held the same romantic fascination for me once when I was young. I asked for this field that I now have. But don't let your imagination get the better of your judgment. Borneo is beautiful, unthinkably beautiful, but that beauty conceals the most savage heart God ever gave human being. It is the striped beauty of the coral snake that strikes and kills without warning."

He paused and almost instantly his face assumed its customary cheerfulness.

"I sha'n't spoil your pleasant visit with my croakings," he declared. "You are going to Bulungan?"

"To see the *pasar*, the famous market that will be held there to-morrow," Grace acknowledged.

"Urge your friends to remain on the main-traveled streets," he advised lightly. "Things are a trifle unsettled there, I understand. I think the captain will explain before you land. Or perhaps you've been told already?" He glanced at her inquiringly.

"We have heard nothing," she replied.

"You're perfectly safe here, of course," the missionary assured. "I'll suggest to the captain that he speak to you before you land."

## CHAPTER II

### THE SCOURGE OF THE SUNDAS

**T**HE same group was seated on the deck a few hours later. Night had fallen, a thick, heavy blanket of night that shut out the shore as effectually as though a solid wall intervened. Occasionally it was cut in twain as the ship's search-light stabbed the sable void with a ray that brought the mangrove-lined shore into sharp relief. Once it surprised a tiger stalking a big turtle, and the startled cat's hurried spring in the protecting shelter of the mangroves afforded those on board a hearty laugh.

The sky was heavily clouded. The moon was in its last quarter, pale and wan, its occasional appearances giving the ocean a ghostly and unreal aspect that made the Zuyder Zee's passengers grateful for its vanishing. "Bobbing in and out like a shy youngster when the company's come," is how Vincent Brady characterized it.

The deck was gayly alight, the white canvas roof above mildly reflecting the incandescent's glare. The Borneesche Industrie Maatschappij, under whose flag the packet sailed, was very careful of the comforts of those who traveled first-class on its ships.

Violet Coston and Grace Coston, with Mrs. Derringer seated between them, were discussing in low tones matters of purely feminine interest. All three were snugly wrapped in steamer blankets, for the night was typically tropic and chill. Vincent Brady and John Bright sat next each other on one side of the ladies, with the Yankee trader opposite. They chatted for a time until Vincent turned to the missionary with the remark:

"The captain's cautioned me against stopping at Bulungan. He advises we go on to Sarawak and see Borneo from the British side. Is there any danger?"

"There is always danger for a white man in East Borneo," John Bright replied tactfully. "It is the new frontier of the Orient."

"I'm aware of that. I was referring to late developments that made a visit to Bulungan inadvisable at this time. Have you heard anything?"

John Bright paused before replying.

"I don't want to alarm you unnecessarily," he responded in a low tone. "But the times are a little uncertain. There have been some ugly rumors afloat and the natives are restless. Borneo, you know, is volcanic in more senses than one."

Though he spoke cheerfully there was a note of gravity in his tones that compelled attention.

"In what way have the Dyaks been restless?" Brady asked. "Have there been any riots or uprisings?"

He took no pains to modulate his tones as the missionary had done. The murmur of voices ceased and every member of the group looked expectantly at John Bright. Grace's lovely eyes glowed like twin violet moons as she leaned forward with the frank eagerness of a child.

The missionary deliberated a perceptible moment.

"It is sometimes difficult for one to say why he believes certain things are true," he replied guardedly. "This is one of those occasions. I have heard it said that men who have spent their lives at sea can forecast a storm with the accuracy of a barometer. Nature has sharpened their perceptions beyond those of the average individual, they feel in the atmosphere the absence of certain conditions that indicate security and the presence of other conditions that presage violence. In the same way, I presume, those of us who have spent many years among the aborigines are able to feel unrest among them before it expresses itself in action. In my travels about the jungle I have come in contact with many tribes. They have treated me with



uniform courtesy, even the Punans and the Long Wais who are reputed to be cannibals. But in the last few months I have felt an unrest stirring among them. Exactly why I feel this way, I cannot say. Certainly not because of any change in their attitude toward me. But I do feel that they are plotting mischief. When the storm comes, depend on it, it will come with the suddenness of a typhoon's blast."

There was a stubborn streak in Vincent Brady that had never failed to be aroused by opposition. He did not like to be told that he must or must not. Brought up as the only son of moderately rich parents, he had had his own sweet way since babyhood and the license he had enjoyed had sharpened a naturally willful and imperious disposition.

The missionary's tactful statement, designed to caution without creating alarm, had therefore an opposite effect from what the latter had intended.

"Of course, I don't want to take chances," Brady declared. His stubborn jaw asserted plainly that he would take them if he felt so disposed. "But I don't see why we'd be in any particular danger at Bulungan. There's a garrison there. To-morrow's their fair day and it looks to me as though they'd be precious careful not to do anything to frighten the traders away. We've taken this trip particularly to see the famous fair. I believe the captain's a little premature with his warning."

John Bright made no reply. He was too good a judge of men not to recognize the futility of argument. Grace's glance at her *fiancé* held a little flicker of amusement, for she remembered his almost obstinate refusal when she first suggested the trip to Bulungan. The trader, who was squinting from beneath lowered lids, felt it incumbent upon him to say a few words.

"Mr. Brady," he began sharply, "you know your business. I'm not going to interfere. I generally make it a point not to interfere. Jim Poggs's business is all I can tend to, Jim Poggs's being mine, sir, since Jim Poggs is me. But when I see a young chap coasting along reefs that he's unfamiliar with, and that young

chap has with him two such sweet lookin' girls as are sailing with you, I take the liberty to give him a friendly hail. What I'm gettin' to is this:

"Mr. Bright is right! Eternally right! Bulungan isn't a healthy place for you these days. It wouldn't be healthy if you were alone. It's a doggone sight unhealthier since you've got ladies with you. Those Dyaks and Malays are cooking up a pot of mischief, just as Mr. Bright says. It's liable to boil over any day. Since they've got the notion in their head, to-morrow's just as good a day as any other to them. What do they care for trade when they can get loot? So if you want to avoid trouble, and something you may ever afterward wish to forget, stay on board."

The trader spoke bluntly, but the rugged simplicity and sincerity of his speech salved it from offense. Vincent bristled belligerently when Poggs referred to Grace and Mrs. Coston as "sweet-lookin' girls," but noticing the evident amusement of the others, saved himself from sharp language that could only have made him ridiculous.

"You've talked plainly, captain," he began quizzically.

"I aim to," Poggs grunted.

"I believe your advice is well meant and sound," Vincent continued. "Possibly it will be advisable for us to go on to Sarawak. But I think I'll slip ashore for an hour or two while we're taking on and discharging freight at Bulungan to-morrow, whether the rest of you elect to stay on board or not. There can't be much danger as long as there's trading going on."

Poggs gave an unintelligible grunt. Grace's eyes said as distinctly as though she had spoken that if Vincent went ashore she would go also. Violet, on the other hand, reclined lazily in her chair like a sleepy kitten and listened to the dialogue with a faint smile of cynical amusement that broadened when Vincent announced his intention of going ashore willynilly. John Bright, watching them both, became grave.

"Claws under the fur," he murmured to himself, look-

ing fixedly at the sophisticated little widow. "She knows she can twist him the way she wants to."

A feeling of paternal tenderness came over him for the warm-hearted and impulsive girl who had given her promise to Vincent Brady.

"Sarawak's perfectly safe, I suppose?" Vincent asked in a tone that carried a hint of sarcasm. "That's British soil."

"As safe as Kew or Hyde Park," Bright replied. "Sarawak has been under the control of white men longer than Bulungan. Its people have accepted our rule."

"If that's the case we might hire a proa and run along the coast a bit," Vincent remarked, struck with a sudden idea. "What do you say, Grace? It would give you the first-hand acquaintance with Borneo you've wanted." There was a touch of banter in his tones.

The missionary's face became serious again. "I must advise you against that," he declared. "So long as you remain in Sarawak you are safe. But you wouldn't be safe at sea in a proa."

"Why not?" Vincent challenged.

"Pirates!" the trader interjected succinctly. "No proa is safe anywhere these days."

"Merciful Heavens," Mrs. Derringer gasped.

Vincent turned toward the missionary with a short laugh. "I thought Britannia ruled the seas," he bantered. "Do you mean to say you harbor pirates in your well-regulated province?"

"I was referring to the Dordrecht affair, Mr. Bright," the trader explained.

"I haven't seen any official statement in regard to it," the missionary rejoined.

"The colonial office hasn't made any statement, so far as I know," Poggs acknowledged. "But everything points one way. It's Ah Sing's work. He's back again."

"Mercy!" Mrs. Derringer shrieked. Her hands gripped each other convulsively. Her face was a ghastly white in the glare of the incandescents.

Violet Coston sat up sharply. "What is it?" she demanded with a note of anxiety in her voice. "What is this Dordrecht affair and who is Ah Sing?"

John Bright cast a glance of stern rebuke at the trader. Poggs's eyes fell and he shuffled uncomfortably in his chair.

"Looks as though I've spilled the beans," he remarked apologetically.

The missionary spoke. "The Dordrecht affair that Mr. Poggs referred to, Mrs. Coston, is the strange disappearance of a ship that carried passengers and freight in the coastwise trade from Batavia to Bandjermassin and Macassar. It was found derelict some time ago with passengers and crew missing. There are some who believe it was captured and looted by pirates. In fact, the report gained a wide circulation and general credence. But the authorities, I understand, do not hold this view. Personally I think there is good reason for doubt. If the vessel were taken by pirates, why didn't they sink it? Why should they permit evidence of their crime to float about the ocean? To me it appears more likely that the ship was caught in a hurricane that swept the Java sea about that time, sprung a leak, and was deserted by the passengers and crew. The same explanation would account for our failure to hear from those aboard her again, for it would be impossible for small boats to live in such a sea as raged while the storm was on. The Dordrecht when picked up, I am told, was wholly waterlogged and was only kept from sinking by the sandalwood in her hold."

"That sandalwood was all she had aboard, too," Poggs growled.

The missionary's glance was withering. Poggs hastily clamped his lips.

"It is more than probable that the wreck was stripped by natives before it was towed into port by the coaster that found it," Bright pointed out.

"Two years ago my sister wrote me from Manila that she was sailing on the Swansea to spend Christmas with us at Batavia," Mrs. Derringer murmured hoarsely,

like one awakening from a horrid dream. "We waited for weeks. One day Mr. Derringer picked up a copy of the *Batavia Courant* and noticed the Swansea's name. He had a clerk translate the item. It stated that the Swansea had been found derelict and looted. Her deck was covered with headless corpses. I never saw my sister again. It was Ah Sing's work."

She shrunk into her chair, a huddled, abject figure, and wrung her hands. As the darting searchlight explored the vast wastes of the sea ahead she followed its course with frightened eyes, as though she fearfully expected to see a pirate ship materialize out of the darkness.

"Is Ah Sing still at large?" Mrs. Coston demanded in a high-pitched voice.

"I assure you, *madame*, he hasn't been heard of for two years," John Bright assured her earnestly. "Since Peter Gross, Resident of Bulungan, broke up the pirate confederacy at the battle of the Kwanga River there have been no pirate depredations."

"Why do people think he may be responsible for the accident that happened to this ship?" Mrs. Coston inquired. "Has he returned to this vicinity?"

"I'd like to hear the whole story," Vincent added.

Seeing that further evasion was impossible the missionary resigned himself to the unpleasant task of telling the pirate's history.

"I'll be happy to tell you the little I know about Ah Sing," he replied. "That little is probably more than half romance. I have never seen him personally, although there are many that have. I am told that he was for years a tavern-keeper at the Chinese kampong in Batavia and bore a reasonably good reputation for one of his trade, although suspected of shanghaiing sailors. In some way he became interested in piracy. He gradually gained an ascendancy over the wilder elements in these islands and eventually became the head of a crude sort of pirate confederation. Under his leadership it became a formidable power and a scourge

to commerce. The natives were in great awe of him and esteemed him as a sort of Oriental Napoleon, a modern Genghis Khan. But it's not so difficult to acquire that sort of a reputation among them. They are a superstitious lot, and if a man does something a little out of the ordinary he is quickly revered as a sort of demigod."

Poggs grunted. He was smoking furiously and clamped his cigar between his teeth as though to emphasize that he did not intend to take any part in the discussion.

"Is he really a formidable leader, or is all this merely a mushroom reputation?" Grace asked.

"I didn't intend to belittle his ability," the missionary replied. "There is no question in my mind but that he was a really dangerous character for some years until, as I said, he was defeated by Peter Gross. If he has come back to these waters it will be a serious matter, for he possesses a remarkable talent for organizing the savage tribes and will not scruple to use it. I do not doubt that he was at one time the actual leader of practically all the free-booting marauders of Java, Celebes, Borneo, and the surrounding small islands. How far his control went I do not know, but I do know that when big game was in sight the pirates hunted in packs, something that was never done before his time. They did a slave business among those tribes not leagued with them, and thus forced many of them to pay tribute and obey their orders. They were a ruthless lot and spared neither man, woman nor child. The sea Dyaks were their allies and it was generally understood that they made the many inlets of Bulungan Residency their headquarters. It is mostly jungle, you know, and to find them was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

"The British navy tried its hand at ridding the seas of them but they took refuge in the lagoons and creeks where the big ships could not follow. The British then served notice on the Dutch that they must be suppressed or Great Britain would take summary action. The

Dutch were at their wit's end until one of your countrymen, Mrs. Coston, a sailor named Peter Gross, was named Resident of Bulungan. He accomplished wonders and wiped the pirates out in short order."

"Did he get Ah Sing?" Mrs. Coston asked.

"No, I regret to say that he did not," the missionary acknowledged. "The pirates were defeated and very nearly wiped out, but Ah Sing escaped. He has not been heard from since. The general opinion is that he fled north to China and hid himself in that immense yellow ocean of humanity."

"You can bet he's back all right," the trader growled, finding it impossible to keep silence longer.

"If he should be, we have nothing to fear on board the Zuyder Zee," the missionary declared firmly. "The ship is well armed.

"I wouldn't trust myself sailing around on any proa," the trader returned. He took the cigar from his mouth with a flourish and tilted back his chair.

"I know Ah Sing," he declared. "Had many a drink at his pub at Batavia when I was still sailing. Ah Sing was the shrewdest crimp between here and Frisco, and that's some compliment. Never saw him when he didn't have a man or two to sell to a needy skipper. And mighty few ships ever laid alongside Tanjong Priok without losing a man or two to him."

"I don't understand," Mrs. Coston remarked in a puzzled voice.

"This Ah Sing ran a pub, a *rumah makan* as the brownskins call it, a hotel for Chinks and natives in the Chinese kampong at Batavia. Sailors went there for their liquor, but mighty few went back to their own ships again. You see, *madame*, something would be mixed in their drinks and when they woke up their ships would be gone and they could look for another berth. Where Ah Sing would come in was in selling their services to the first needy skipper that put into port, and ships were always short-handed in those days. Maybe he'd sell two or three men to the very skipper he'd just robbed of other hands. Oh, he was a clever

one! Fat as a Christmas duck, always sitting on the colonnaded porch of his *rumah makan* at the edge of the kampong smiling welcome at you, bland and innocent as your laundry boy. 'How are you, Ah Sing?' the boys from the English and American ships would carol as they came rolling in, singing their chanteys. 'Belly fine, boys,' he'd say, 'come and have a drink.' He'd learned that down in 'Frisco where he once ran a hop joint. Mr. Sailor would drink and that would be the last he'd know till another ship hove in port. The boys knew it but it made no difference to them. The Chinaman fed them fair and treated them square and one skipper was as good or bad as another."

"How did he work his piracy, as a side line?" Vincent asked, frankly interested.

"Nobody ever knew he was interested until Peter Gross got wise. How he learned it, I don't know. But he was appointed Resident to Bulungan, as Mr. Bright told you, and proceeded to round things up. Ah Sing nearly got him once but a gunboat turned up in time and then Peter Gross turned round and smashed the pirates in a big fight. Ah Sing got away. I've heard it said that the Chinaman has vowed he would put Peter Gross to the torture yet. I understand he's got a little glass tube nicely labeled and filed away, to hold Gross's finger and toe nails when he gets them. Those are the relics he keeps of the enemies he's put under the sod. Interesting practice, isn't it?"

Mrs. Derringer shuddered. The trader's conversation was a trifle too blunt to be pleasant, but Grace found herself unable to leave the deck. Her blood tingled with the romance of it, and she thrilled with a delicious creepy feeling as she stared into the darkness all around them.

"Who is Peter Gross?" she asked.

"I've never met him," the trader replied promptly. "Have you, Mr. Bright?"

"I have not had that fortune," the missionary responded quietly.

"Your information is hearsay then, like my own,"



Poggs declared. "All I can tell you about Peter Gross is that he's a Yankee like ourselves, straight as a string, and the only man in these parts since Brooke's time who's known how to deal with Dyaks and Malays. Isn't that true, Mr. Bright?"

"He is a wonderful man!" the missionary acknowledged. "A man to fit the place and the time. God's own instrument to bring peace to this war-torn island. The Dutch were facing the problem of either commencing a war of extermination against the natives or giving up their province, when Peter Gross went to Bulungan and saved the Residency for them. He is there to-day, I trust, the one man in the entire Indies who can stave off the worst native uprisings since the Delhi Mutiny."

"Aye, the one man," the trader assented.

"What sort of an appearing man is he?" Mrs. Coston asked.

"I've never met him, consequently I cannot give you much of a description," John Bright replied. "I understand that he's a young thirty, unmarried, and physically very large. One of the tallest and most powerful men in Borneo, I am told."

"Would it be possible for us to pay our respects to him to-morrow at Bulungan?" Grace asked. She smiled at the missionary. "He's our countryman, you know, and I feel very proud of him."

"He may be at the landing," John Bright replied, returning the smile. Her ardent youth made a powerful appeal to him. "It would be quite likely as the coming of a mail ship is quite an event at such an isolated post as Bulungan."

"If he isn't I shall be tempted to run ashore despite the captain's warning," Grace replied. "I must meet this American who is making such a wonderful name for himself so far from home."

"I do not think you will be disappointed," the missionary declared courteously. "He has that divine gift, vision." His eyes became dreamy. "Aye, he has the

vision. I have heard tales of him and the manner he has won over the natives, sometimes by force, but more often by patience and persuasion. Even the wildest and most untamable tribes are beginning to perceive his stern sense of right and truth. "The White Father" they are beginning to call him. And he is not yet thirty! Wonderful, isn't it? But that's because he knows Borneo, fetid, slimy, pestilential Borneo, the cesspool into which the dregs of humanity have been drained, the jungle and marsh that breeds poisonous insects and poisonous men, the last defense of the serpent in man. Aye, he knows it, knows its cruel, vindictive soul, its treacherous, unprincipled mind, its bestial appetite, its hands itching for murder and loot.

"But in spite of all these things he has been able to see some spark of the divine, some bit of God's beauty and goodness in these sordid Dyak souls, and has caused it to blossom. God's messenger, I call him, the hope of Borneo, the hope of all of us who work here."

Grace heaved a tremulous sigh. The spell of the missionary's eloquence was on her and she could not take her eyes from him for a few moments. The shuffling of a foot on the bridge above roused her. She looked up quickly, catching just a glimpse of a tall form standing there and looking out to sea. She was quite sure she recognized the young man who had fled after offering her a chair a few hours before.

"Captain seems to be looking for pirates," Vincent remarked, glancing upward. The sally was received in silence.

"I have a headache," Violet Coston complained.

"Can't I help you, dear?" Grace asked sympathetically.

"It won't be necessary," Mrs. Coston replied with affected languidness. "If Vincent will take me to my room." She glanced toward him expectantly. He leaped forward and offered his arm.

"Good night, Grace," she murmured. "Good night, Mrs. Derringer. Good night, gentlemen—good night!"

There was a lingering fondness in the last word, thrown over her shoulder as she moved away with Vincent. John Bright's eyes narrowed grimly.

"Sit next to me, Miss Coston," Mrs. Derringer directed. "I want to talk to you."

## CHAPTER III

### AH SING STRIKES

**A** HALF-HOUR passed and Vincent did not return. The little packet steamed steadily on toward the still distant haven of Bulungan. Of the group that had gathered on the forward deck but two remained, Mrs. Derringer and Grace. Whatever the latter's feelings may have been at her lover's delinquency, she concealed them well. She listened with admirable restraint to the dowager's tedious reminiscences and occasionally interposed a question or comment that indicated she was giving her attention. A shrewd observer might have deduced, however, that she was remaining on deck in order to escape the mortification of going below unaccompanied.

"Peter Gross ought not to be given the whole credit for chasing the pirates out of Bulungan," Mrs. Derringer sagely observed. "If it wasn't for the Argus Pheasant he wouldn't have done much."

The appellation caught Grace's fancy. "Who is the Argus Pheasant?" she inquired.

"You haven't heard?" Mrs. Derringer asked, in the rising voice of the gossip who has a spicy bit of news to impart. "Why, the Argus Pheasant, Koyala, is the most famous beauty in the whole of East India. She's priestess of the Dyaks, and she fairly worships the ground Peter Gross walks on."

"A native woman?" Grace inquired. She experienced a strange sinking of the heart. Was another idol to be shattered, she asked herself.

"Half white and half Dyak," Mrs. Derringer replied. "The daughter of a Frenchman and a Dyak woman."

But you'd never guess it from seeing her. She's a wonderful beauty, and as fierce and wild as a tiger."

"Isn't the light deceiving!" Grace remarked hastily. "Three times now I would have sworn that I saw a boat drifting out yonder, and when I looked again there was nothing to be seen."

Mrs. Derringer, however, was not so easily diverted from a theme as entertaining as the one she had just launched herself upon.

"There's no question but what those two, Peter Gross and the Argus Pheasant, are hand in glove together," she hinted darkly. "She got the Dyaks to side with him. She helped him drive out Ah Sing. The Chinaman wanted her himself, and some say she might have listened to him if Peter Gross hadn't come. John Bright talks with a lot of respect about Peter Gross, but it seems strange to me that this half-breed woman should cling to him the way she does."

Mrs. Derringer nodded her head sagely.

"There it is again—I'm sure it's a boat," Grace cried, rising excitedly and pointing over the bow toward an object rising and falling on the rolling sea. As if in answer to her cry, the search-light was focused upon it. As the object again rose within their circle of vision it became apparent that it was a whaleboat. There were figures in it, lying in the bottom.

The packet veered, heading toward the craft. Several curt orders sounded, unintelligible to Grace because they were in the Dutch language. Some of the crew sprang toward a boat and lowered it. There was no noise or confusion, and few of the passengers were aware that anything had occurred to break the monotony of the voyage.

The screw began to revolve more slowly. The ship was edging in toward shore, due to the impulse of a strong current. As she began to lose headway a boat was dropped over the side. Half a dozen lusty sailors manned the oars and pulled toward the drifting whaleboat.

Leaning against the rail, Grace and Mrs. Derringer

watched with bated breath as the two craft neared each other. A premonition of evil, a vague, undefined fear of she knew not what, came upon Grace. Her thoughts recurred to the conversation on the deck a few hours since, to Bright's warning, and to the reminiscences of the Yankee trader.

Was this floating object before them to reveal another of the terrible tragedies of these ruthless seas, she asked herself.

The two boats were only about ten feet apart when a curious thing occurred. One of the two apparently lifeless forms in the bottom of the derelict suddenly rose and dove over the side. The other followed. The crew in the other boat rested on their oars, seemingly mystified.

"They were shamming!" Grace exclaimed in amazement. "I wonder—"

The sentence was left incomplete. For from the other side of the ship at that moment came a weird, blood-curdling cry—a cry that froze the blood of all those on board who heard it. It was the war-cry of the Bajau marauders, the pirates of the Celebes Sea.

Hardly had the cry ceased when a response came from below, the shrieks of women, the hoarse shouts of men awakened suddenly to find themselves in the presence of death. Doors were flung open, vomiting humanity as the terror-stricken natives rushed on deck.

Grace saw the men in the packet-boat whirl their craft and pull madly back to the ship. Out of the darkness behind her a volley sounded. Four of the six men at the oars collapsed in their seats and slid into the bottom of the boat. Another burst of shot and the others fell, one dropping overboard while he was in the act of diving for safety.

The boat swung broadside to. Grace saw the writhing bodies in the bottom of the frail shell and the splintered planking stained with blood—a never-to-be-forgotten picture. Then darkness swallowed them, the dying and the dead, as the shaft of light swung shoreward.

Directly to port was a rocky cove, not more than five hundred yards distant. Proas were darting out of this

like angry bees out of a hive. Each proa was filled with husky, dark-skinned warriors who were urging it toward the ship with every ounce of strength in their bodies. Between the packet and the shore the sea was dotted with other native craft loaded to the gunwale with Malay and Dyak fighting men, hideous, nearly nude creatures with rings through their nostrils and ears. They carried long rifles, pistols, spears, and sumpitans, and every man had his favorite kris or padang. Their swollen, distorted features, animated with lust for slaughter and loot, were made doubly repulsive by the violent pigments they had used to make their appearance more fearful, yellow ocher and blue clay, flaring vermilion and dark blue, with cross-bars of flaming scarlet.

At the sight of that terrible crew Mrs. Derringer uttered a piercing scream and fell to the deck in a faint. Overcome by the horror of the moment, Grace was unconscious of the elder woman's condition until she stepped forward blindly, with stiffened limbs, and stumbled against Mrs. Derringer's recumbent form. Even then she was hardly able to tear her eyes from the scene before her, which held her in the grip of a terrible fascination. Bending down, she began mechanically to unfasten Mrs. Derringer's waist with fingers that trembled so that she was scarcely able to direct them.

The attack was delivered against the stern of the ship. Above the wild yells of the natives and the agonized cries of the passengers rose the crack of pistols. Evidently some resistance was being made. While Grace was fumbling with the fastenings at Mrs. Derringer's throat two of the Dutch contingent of the crew sprang by her toward the quick-firer, mounted at the bow. It was the work of only a few moments to swing into position, enter a charge, and fire, yet to Grace it seemed hours. As the steel-clad messengers of death hurtled forward Grace saw three proas in the line of fire crumple up. A fierce thrill of exultation siezed her as hope flared in her breast.

A hoarse shout sounded from the darkness aft. It had hardly died away when there was the simultaneous

sound of a volley and breaking glass. The beam of light that had been revealing their enemies to those on board went out.

Grace heard an oath, deep and fervent, from one of the members of the gun-crew. The words were still on his lips when he threw his head back queerly, thrust both hands into the pit of his stomach, crumpled, and fell a quivering corpse at her feet. His limbs twitched spasmodically and he lay still.

"Gerrit?" his companion cried fiercely and questioningly. It was his last word. As he sprang forward to aid his stricken friend he fell over the latter's recumbent body, with a gaping bullet-wound in his forehead.

That she did not scream or swoon or give way in some manner was ever thereafter a source of wonder to Grace. Strangest of all, it seemed to her later, was the fact that she was not afraid. She left Mrs. Derringer and examined the bodies of both men, satisfying herself that they were beyond her or any other mortal aid. Then she returned to the dowager and proceeded with the task of resuscitating her.

All this had transpired in a comparatively few moments. The captain's first act, when he discovered the nature of the attack, was to signal for full speed ahead. There was some delay in the engine-room. Whatever caused it, it was fatal. The bells below jangled imploringly for speed as the pirates swept down like hawks and clambered on the deck. Finally the engineer responded. There was a moment of terrific strain as the mighty engines exerted their power, then the screw began to revolve furiously. A hiss of escaping steam sounded from below.

"Good God!" the captain gasped. His face went white as a polar field. He knew what had occurred—the pirates, by some infernal device, had sheared the blades off the propeller, and there was no time to put on the extra one, held in reserve for such emergencies. The Zuyder Zee was like a hamstrung hind in the midst of a pack of wolves.

A wild and exultant yell came from the attackers at



the success of their stratagem. They surged forward. Reenforcements kept streaming over the rail, pressing back the brave crew that had been maintaining their thin line and holding the marauders at bay.

A huge Malay swinging a gleaming parang sprang into the midst of the fray and brought his heavy blade down upon a sailor who was thrusting another foe back with a clubbed musket. The great sword cut between the clavicle and sternum, splitting the unfortunate sailor almost in two. With a fiendish yell of triumph the pirate chief burst through the breach his blade had made. His followers surged after him. The white line wavered a moment and crumpled into small groups waging a hopeless and despairing fight against circles of dark faces that hemmed them in.

Fascinated by the spectacle, and held numb in frozen horror, Grace bent motionless on the deck beside the recumbent form of Mrs. Derringer. Just as the fight was at its hottest, and before the sailors' front had been broken, Mrs. Derringer recovered from her faint and rose to a sitting posture. She gazed with bewildered eyes at the drama below. As recollection returned, her bewilderment gave way to panic. When the huge Malay swung his kris and cut the sailor in two, the accumulated train of horrors proved too great a burden for her overwrought brain, and reason snapped. She leaped to her feet with a maniacal cry, and before Grace realized her intent or could make a motion to restrain her, she hurled herself headlong over the rail into the sea.

At that moment the lights went out.

With the drowning woman's insane shriek ringing in her ears, together with the triumphant yells of the savage Bajaus and their allies, and darkness absolute enveloping her like a great wet blanket, Grace cowered to the deck. Until now she had not experienced fear. She had been too stunned, the calamity had been too sudden and overwhelming, and events had passed too rapidly to enable her surfeited brain to experience the emotion of terror.

But now that she was alone in the darkness, with violence and strife all around her, with the moans of the

dying mingled inextricably with the groans and prayers of the living and the savage yells of the conquerors dominant, her courage failed her.

"God have mercy on me," she prayed. "God have mercy on me."

The fierce desire of the hunted for refuge assailed her. But there was no refuge. Below were the savages, on both sides the sea. There was only one way of escape from a fate worse than death, Mrs. Derringer's way. She shrank from it; life had never before seemed so infinitely sweet and precious, so much to be cherished, as at this moment. The sea had never before appeared so cold and deep, so dark and sullen and cruel. But to stay on the ship was worse. The triumphant yells of the pirates told of their victory, the cries of the victims by now having ceased almost entirely.

"Vincent!" she gasped. "Violet!" If they might only cross the border together, she thought, death would not be so terrible.

She tried to rise, but her nerveless limbs refused to respond. It was as though all life had already gone from them, as if her nervous system had collapsed under the strain put upon it. Summoning a supreme effort of will, she pulled herself to her feet. She staggered toward the rail, lurching at the roll of the vessel, now swung broadside to the waves.

A powerful hand grasped her arm. A low grunt sounded in her face, a swinish grunt of satisfaction. In the light of the pale moon just appearing from behind a cloud she saw the grinning, sinister features of a huge savage, a flat-nosed creature like a chimpanzee. He had heavy brass rings through his nostrils and his head was covered with a thick cluster of coarse black hair. He had been in the act of climbing over the rail, apparently from a proa below, as she approached.

The shock of the surprise was so great that Grace could not utter a cry. Her vocal cords seemed paralyzed. But as the savage gave another delighted grunt at the beauty of his prize and pulled her shrinking form toward him, a despairing shriek rose from her throat.

"Vincent!" she cried.

A footfall sounded beside her, a light footfall, silent as a woods creature's. The savage uttered a guttural exclamation and released her to seize his kris. But the lightning struck him first. A heavy bar crashed into his face, a bar that flattened his ugly features and cracked his skull like an egg-shell. Without a moan he toppled into the dark waters below.

There was a simultaneous yell of execration from several voices below. Grace felt a strong arm sweep about her waist. A voice whispered in her ear: "Keep quiet, don't make a sound." She felt herself carried swiftly across the deck. She was lifted across the rail and swung perilously out from the ship in the arm of the man who had rescued her.

Grace acknowledged afterward that she had no other thought at this moment but that she was going to her death. She believed that he who had saved her from the savage had no other purpose in mind than to offer death as a more welcome fate than captivity. Her only emotion was one of gratitude. Face to face for a moment with the greater evil, death, formerly so terrible, was now a welcome relief. It was only the horror of dying alone that held her back.

"Good-by, Vincent; good-by, Violet," she whispered in a voice that only the angels heard. The stranger paused a moment, scanned the dark waters rolling below them, and as the ship leaned over under a receding wave, tightened his grip on her and dropped swiftly.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE HUT IN THE JUNGLE

**T**HOSE who have gone down into the depths and have been brought back from the brink of the hereafter tell strange tales of the unique sensation of drowning. They tell us of a gradual lapsing into unconsciousness to the tintinnabulation of bells swelling to orchestral choruses as the soul struggles to rise from its corporeal habitation. They picture to us a marvelous sense of freedom and elation, a sense of floating in an ethereal vastness that knows neither height nor breadth, a halcyon bliss transcending mortality's sublimest moment.

The experience of Grace Coston was otherwise. As the sea boiled over her she felt herself drawn into a vortex that swept her irresistibly down in dizzy spirals. There was a tremendous roaring in her ears, a roaring comparable only to the grinding of huge bergs of ice impelled by contrary currents. She felt herself borne at an incredible speed to fathomless depths. Her lungs filled despite her effort not to breathe, her heart seemed nigh to bursting, and consciousness was dulling when the waters parted. She gasped for breath.

The man who had leaped off the deck of the Zuyder Zee with her held her with one arm while he cautiously used the other to keep them both afloat.

"Can you swim?" he asked in a low tone.

"Not very far—in these clothes," she replied.

"It's only a little way to shore," he stated. "Try to remove your slippers and that heavy coat. But don't discard them. Give them to me. I'll keep you above."

A moment before she had been quite ready for death.

But the shock of contact with the sea and the awful sense of suffocation she had experienced as they went down into the sable depths had altered her desire. The instinct for self-preservation, ever strong in youth, was dominant, and impelled her to make a fight for life. With womanly dependence on male strength and leadership in moments of peril and stress, she obediently did as she had been instructed.

"We must swim quietly," her mysterious companion declared in a subdued voice after she had divested herself of her heavier clothing. She indicated her assent by action instead of by words, husbanding her breath and strength. Cleaving the water with the long, clean strokes that mark the proficient swimmer, she headed toward the thin line of white breakers some distance ahead, where the surf of the long Macassar Straits boomed against a rockbound shore. The man swam beside her, moderating his pace to hers.

Somewhere to the left a faint cry for help arose. It was a man's voice. She thought instantly of Vincent, and impulsively altered her course. But with two swift strokes the man beside her intercepted her and forced her back to her original course.

"We can't do him any good; he's done for," he whispered in a low voice. "We'll be lucky to reach shore ourselves. We've got to keep out of sight of these proas; if any of them sight us we're done for. Can you swim under water?"

"A little," Grace said.

"When I say 'Duck' take a long breath and catch hold of me," the stranger directed. "Don't struggle and don't interfere with my movements. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she whispered. A little catch of fear seized her heart. She had not thought of this danger. But as they rose on the surge and she looked anxiously about, she perceived the long, slim forms of several native craft silhouetted against the horizon. They were darting toward the ship like vultures on the scent of carrion. A few of them boldly carried lights, for there was no longer

need for concealment since all opposition on the ship had ceased.

"They'll be too anxious to get their share of the loot to pay any attention to us," the man remarked in guarded tones. "But at the same time it won't do to take chances."

They swam along in silence. As they sank into the hollow of a great roller, a big proa, loaded toward the gunwale with warriors who were impelling it forward with every ounce of strength in their sturdy bodies, suddenly rose on the crest of the wave ahead. Grace felt the man's arm close about her and pull her down. She came up half strangled and coughing, but her companion instantly stifled her struggles by clamping a hand over her mouth. In the next few moments she underwent all the agonies of drowning for a second time that night.

"I beg your pardon, but it was necessary," an apologetic voice whispered in her ear a few moments later, when they were a safe distance away. "I'm afraid, at that, they saw us. Some of them were looking back."

Resentful at being used so roughly, Grace disdained making a reply, and struck out viciously toward the now nearing line of breakers. Her companion made no remonstrance, but kept pace with her, swimming easily and without effort about a foot behind.

After a few minutes of such violent motion Grace began to feel the drain on her powers. Clad for the water, she could swim a mile or more, and had often accomplished the feat. But swimming in a placid fresh-water lake when attired for it was a vastly different proposition from swimming in a tumultuous, heaving ocean under the burden of heavy clothing, she found. Fortunately the water was warm. Otherwise her strength must have failed her.

Her companion evidently noticed that she was weakening, for he advised:

"Better save your strength until we get into the surf. We are fairly safe now."

Still piqued at his rough treatment of her, Grace chose to read into his words a reflection on her ability to take care of herself. Her chin rose defiantly from the water and she struck out desperately, pulling ahead a few strokes. A rude hand clasped her arm and a stern voice hissed into her ear:

"Miss Coston, you will do as I direct. There are more lives than our own two dependent on it."

Her momentary vexation vanished. The stranger's words held a promise.

"Do you think some of them may escape?" she cried eagerly, between gasps. "Can we help them?"

"Wait till we get ashore," he replied curtly. "Be silent now—"

Ahead of them the breakers loomed. They boiled over a broad barrier of sharp-toothed rocks that rose ugly as sharks' fins from the sable waters. Interspersed were tall obelisks of black shale. The huge swelling surges rose in solid walls of foaming sea and battered themselves to destruction against the gaunt guardians of the Bornean coast. The thin, frothy line of gray scud that had looked so ephemeral from the deck of the Zuyder Zee was now revealed as a boiling caldron. That a human being could pass through such a vortex and live seemed incredible. A numb despair gripped Grace's heart. Her courage failed her and she clutched weakly at her companion.

As if expecting such an attempt on her part, he slipped out of her grasp.

"Keep cool now, and maintain your stroke," he counseled cheerfully. "We're almost ashore."

Swimming slowly, in a course parallel to the beach, he kept himself and her warily out of reach of the jealous fangs of rock that bobbed up unexpectedly in their path. All her self-assertiveness gone, Grace obeyed dumbly, conserving her rapidly ebbing strength.

Ten rods or more of this swimming had brought them steadily nearer the line of breakers, when the man was

suddenly galvanized into activity. "Now!" he cried shrilly, catching hold of her. "Swim for your life!"

With a gasping intake of breath, Grace exerted all the strength she had left. At the same instant she felt herself pulled irresistably forward. The great surges boiled over her, filling her nostrils and lungs with water, obscuring everything. Swifter and swifter she was drawn ahead in the very vortex of the writhing seas.

A huge black bulk of rock loomed before them. The giant rollers split upon it and churned in a mad frenzy. A mighty comber lifted them and hurled them through the spindrift at the jagged edge of shale as though they were feathers. Just as it seemed that they must inevitably be cut in two, a cross-current caught them and carried them swiftly in its millrace past the rock into a pool of quiet water behind. They spun out of this into a placid eddy.

Grasping for breath, Grace struck out erratically, but her companion retained his hold.

"If you'll lie on your back and float I'll have both of us ashore in a few minutes," he remarked in a low voice close to her ear.

She smiled back courageously. Unfortunately the smile was wasted on the darkness.

"I think I can swim," she replied, "if you'll permit me, please!"

He released her without a word. She breathed deeply once or twice and cleaved the water. But there was no strength in her limbs. She was tired, very tired, and the shore seemed a long distance away. It was difficult to keep her head above, she found, and she did not seem to be making any progress. Too proud to ask for help and vexed at her weakness, she struggled gamely on. She noticed that the man remained close to her, accommodating his pace to hers. His attitude of protection enraged her. She struggled frantically to tear away this fluid obstacle that slipped by her limbs without giving leverage. But her exhausted body could do no more. She felt herself sinking. An awful sense of helplessness



and utter impotence came upon her. She uttered a despairing cry, the cry of the drowning, then the waters closed over her. As the world was blotted out once more, leaving her floating in a measureless void, she felt again the strong hand of the man who had brought her through the perils of the rocks into this quiet lagoon.

"Don't struggle; trust me," a calm, strong voice declared. Too weak to resist, she lay inertly on the surface, feeling the stranger's hand under her back and feeling the play of his powerful muscles as he swam shoreward with long, telling strokes. A few minutes later his feet touched bottom. He lifted her into his arms and strode shoreward. She struggled to release herself.

"I can walk," she remonstrated.

"Quiet!" was his stern whisper.

She yielded. Instinctively she felt that he would not have insisted had it not been necessary. He walked cautiously, a step at a time, his eyes striving to pierce the somber jungle shades, and his ears straining to catch every one of the multitudinous sounds of a tropic forest.

The errant moon that had been playing hide and seek all night chose this moment to make another fitful appearance. Its rays fell directly upon the man's tense face. Grace, who was looking upward, caught her first glimpse of his features.

"I thought so," she said to herself, smiling. She had recognized her rescuer. It was the captain's guest, the mysterious young man who kept his identity concealed from the other first-class passengers on board the Zuyder Zee.

A feeling of security came upon her. She lay like a waxen image in his arms. The only dangers she feared now were those the forest might hide. The young man had a face that inspired confidence.

A nightbird whirred noisily out of the thicket ahead of them. The stranger stood stockstill, every muscle tense, every sense alert. Grace scarcely breathed. At last he stepped forward cautiously. At that moment an over-ripe coconut crashed to the ground some distance away,

causing alarm among the jungle folk. There was a rustling in the cane that halted the man in his tracks and caused Grace's heart to cease beating for a moment.

At last they reached shore. Still holding her in his arms, he stepped out of the water, crossed the narrow strip of sandy beach, and clambered up the low bank to the shelter of a group of palms, where he stood and listened again with all the stealth of a savage. Satisfied at length, he bore his burden across a small clearing into the jungle itself. Not until then did he permit Grace to leave his arms.

"Your slippers," he said gravely, offering her her footgear.

The gloom was thick around them. When they were battling the waves she thought night could not be darker than the sable shroud that covered the waters, but here in the forest the curtain of night hung so heavily that it almost seemed to possess substance. She felt a sense of oppression, as if the very air were weighted down with this intangible something that obscured the whole earth. Involuntarily she grasped her companion's arm and clung to it fearfully.

"I can't see anything," she complained in a low voice that had a suspicious quaver in it.

"My eyes are probably better than yours here," he whispered. "I'm used to this."

It was on the tip of her tongue to ask him if he could not produce a light. The utter ridiculousness of such a request occurred to her in time to stop utterance. This brought back the thought of the pirates again, and she nudged closer to him. As if in answer to her unspoken thought, he remarked:

"We can't build a fire here in the open. But if we are where I think we are, we'll have shelter soon. If you're not afraid to be left alone for a few moments, I'll scout around and get my bearings. Will you wait here for me?"

"Alone?" Grace gasped.

"I'm sorry. But I'm afraid it's necessary. I couldn't

take you with me. There's a bit of swamp ahead, if I am not mistaken. I won't be gone more than ten minutes. If anything happens, shout. But," he added impressively, "don't make a sound unless it is absolutely necessary."

"I won't," she promised. "You may go; I'm not afraid." She tried to talk bravely, but her voice had a suspicious quaver. As he stepped away she reached out toward him, as if to hold him, but becoming conscious of her action, drew back her hands. In the darkness he did not notice her pitiful helplessness and dependence on him.

"You're sure you won't be too badly frightened?" he asked again.

Grace longed to reach out and hold him, to say to him that he must not leave her, that wherever he went she must go too. She was afraid, horribly afraid. The night was so dark and the gloom gathered so thickly under the mangroves and in the brush. Her imagination peopled it with a thousand terrors: tigers stalking in the grasses; orang-outangs, the great man-apes, watching them from the tree-tops; vipers underfoot and pythons on the lower branches, and savage Dyaks stealthily crawling through the undergrowth. As her mind conjured these visions, the blood seemed to congeal in her veins and her tongue refused utterance.

He took her silence for consent. With a low whisper: "I'll be back soon," he disappeared into the cane. The bonds that held her speechless broke, she opened her lips with a cry to call him back. But something restrained her. It was the superior courage of good blood, a heritage from a long line of ancestors who had faced the unknown smiling and unafraid and had gone forth to conquer it.

Motionless as a statue, every muscle tense, every nerve quiver, and every sense alert to catch the slightest sound, she stood under the overhanging branches of the tree in whose shade the man had left her. Her heart was beating like a trip-hammer—it must be audible for rods, she thought—and she tried frantically to still its tumultuous pulsations by pressing both hands against her breast.

The minutes dragged along. Hours they seemed to her. All the myriad sounds of a tropic night: the gentle *lap-lap* of the wavelets on the shore of the lagoon; the scurrying rodents over the dry carpet of leaves; the gentle heaving of the huge fronds of the coco-palms as the breeze stirred them; the calls of the night-birds and the occasional whirr of their wings, as some frightened feathered creature plunged into a thicket for concealment; and the monotonous rasping of the crickets, were indelibly impressed upon her memory. A gust of cool, damp land-air swept over her and she shivered. It made her conscious that her clothing was dripping wet. She picked up her dress fold by fold and wrung out the moisture. That done, she bethought herself of the water in her slippers. It made a queer, gurgling sound each time she removed her weight from one foot and placed it on the other. It occurred to her that this might betray her to some prowling savage, so she carefully removed her footgear, one at a time, and poured out the water.

These tasks allayed her fears somewhat and made her less tense. Her eyes, too, began to become accustomed to the gloom. Or perhaps it was due to the fact that the clouds overhead were thinning, permitting the starlight to seep through and cast a vague and uncertain illumination on the waters of the lagoon. Her senses were no less alert, but she no longer started at every sound. Some of the sounds became intelligible. When a small rodent scampered by she stood quite still and made no outcry, knowing it was not a snake.

As the minutes passed and her companion and guide did not return, she began to peer anxiously into the shades. Surely it was time for him to be back, she told herself. He had promised to be back in a few minutes. Nearly a half hour must have passed since he left her. She regretted the loss of her wrist-watch; it was one of the encumbrances she had removed while in the water.

As time continued to pass, her anxiety swelled to alarm. Something might have happened, she argued. He had mentioned a swamp—could he have become mired in the bog? A spasm of fear contracted her heart, not

for herself, but for him. It would be so terrible a death, alone in the darkness, with none to aid. Should she search for him? He had told her to wait. If she left they might lose each other in the darkness. But what if he were perishing?

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Torn between these conflicting fears, she stepped in the direction he had gone, and then stepped back. She longed to call. But he had expressly prohibited. It might bring a horde of savages down upon them.

She was not permitted to decide. In the distance she suddenly heard a quavering cry—a cry like that of a child in mortal distress. Nearer and nearer it came, rushing toward her with incredible swiftness. It swelled to the shriek of a person in mortal agony. She thrust an arm over her face and sank to the ground, feeling that the end had come.

A strong hand clasped her arm and assisted her to her feet.

“Don’t be frightened, Miss Coston,” a low voice whispered in her ear.

She grasped him convulsively, sinking into his arms.

“What was it?” she gasped.

He chuckled. “The noisiest chap in all Borneo. A little beetle about the size of your fingernail. He’s like some men I know, all voice and nothing else.”

She tried to laugh bravely, but her best effort was an hysterical giggle. Unstrung by this climax to a night’s experiences that would have overcome the average woman, she had no strength to go on. She leaned weakly upon him, her slender, graceful form resting in his arms, her fair face, beautiful beyond compare in the silver starlight, turned up to his, her bosom heaving tumultuously.

In that moment she was all his, as helpless as a babe, and he knew it.

It was a temptation surely; the tremulous lips, smiling faintly, ready for kissing; the frail, warm body that lay unresistingly in his arms. Perhaps his breath came a little more quickly, and perhaps his heart kept the same mad time with hers, but he held her without a contraction

of the muscles, quite as impersonally as one holds a fragile, precious bit of porcelain. When the tide of blood resumed its course through her veins he released her gently and said:

"If you feel strong enough, Miss Coston, we'll walk to the hut I mentioned. It's only a short distance away."

"I'm fully able," she hastened to reply. "Wasn't it foolish of me to become so frightened at a beetle?" There was a plaintive note in her voice, like that of a child seeking contradiction.

"Not at all," he assured her earnestly. "I've seen soldiers on guard duty turn pale and shake like a Bajau's hut in flood-time on establishing their first acquaintance with Mynheer Beetle. You were quite brave. I was horribly afraid that you might have run away or done something equally reckless."

"I almost did," she confessed.

"Because something frightened you?"

"No," she negatived. "Because—" She paused, acutely conscious that she could not tell him the reason.

"Because why?" he urged.

"Just because," she replied.

"A woman's reason."

"And therefore sufficient, I hope." Her eyes twinkled maliciously. It was quite safe to flirt this way despite the darkness—for this was a strange and most remarkably modest young man. He had not even tried to hold her more tightly than conventions would permit a few moments hence when she rested in his arms.

"I presume I must accept it as such—for the present," he replied.

Grace did not answer. She wondered what he meant by the phrase "for the present."

"Let us hurry," she suggested, "it is growing colder."

He parted the cane. They skirted the rim of a swampy depression. From the sounds below Grace surmised that it was full of animal life, and she accordingly remained close to him. Delicious shivers of fear ran up and down her spine, yet she walked along resolutely. They plunged

into another thicket. The undergrowth was much heavier here, and he had to lift the overhanging creepers to enable her to pass. The path suddenly ran into a little clearing. In the center of it loomed the black, irregular rectangle of a small hut elevated on posts.

"The house I spoke of," the man explained simply. He walked across the clearing and opened the door, permitting Grace to precede him into the dwelling. Then he closed the door.

They were in absolute darkness. She could hear his labored breathing, for his exertions had begun to tell on him. She could hear him hover about her, a few steps in one direction and then a few steps in another. He was apparently looking for something. A nameless fear came upon her. She had not felt this fear in the forest, but here in this abysmal darkness, with these four walls around them, the presence of a man afflicted her with a sort of nausea, a blind, sickening terror. He was near her now, almost touching her. Her breath came fast. She felt as if she must shriek, but held back the cry, biting her lips. Silently stepping back a pace she reached out her arms as if to ward him off.

A match flashed. In the brilliant light she saw him blinking at her. Gradually his gaze steadied. She saw his merry, almost boyish smile give way to a look of amazement. His face flamed red and his lips closed grimly into a thin white line. Without a word he crossed the room, took a pan containing grease and a wick from a crude cupboard, and lighted the cotton. He placed this on a rough table in the center of the room.

"I couldn't find the matches," he announced gruffly, as if in explanation. "I didn't dare leave a light in the house when I was here before, for fear some prowling Dyak might see it when we opened the door."

The red flamed in her cheeks also. It was the token of her humiliation. She realized how grossly she had wronged him, and how cruelly her suspicion had cut. She should have trusted him, for she knew that he was worthy of that trust. But she could find no word to

assuage the pain of his hurt, and stood convicted by her very silence.

He pulled a huge slab of hollowed-out stone from beneath the cupboard. Pouring some oil into this and inserting several wicks, he started a blaze that threw out considerable heat.

"You'll be able to dry your clothing by this fire," he announced in a tone coldly impersonal. "It will be well for you to get such a rest as you can to-night, for we have a long journey to make to-morrow." He indicated a cot on the side of the room.

He looked around to satisfy himself that everything was satisfactory within. Then he stepped to the door. At the threshold he paused.

"You can bar the door after I'm out with these bamboos," he declared, pointing to several stout sticks that stood against the wall. "If you need me, call. I won't be far away."

She looked at him steadily. There was a color in her cheeks that did not wholly originate from the warmth of the fire.

"How are you going to dry your clothing?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "A wetting or two makes no difference to a sailor," he replied indifferently.

"The night is damp," she replied. "There is malaria in these jungles. I cannot let you risk your health in this manner."

"I can walk myself dry in an hour," he declared coldly.

"Nonsense!" she replied spiritedly. "There is no need of that. You are in as great need of rest as I am."

Her glance swept the room uncertainly and fell upon a broad strip of bamboo matting rolled in a corner.

"We can divide this room in two by using this matting as a screen," she declared, unrolling it to examine it. "See, it is in good condition. Will you help me put it up?"

His eyes rested upon hers in stern inquiry. She met them tranquilly and frankly. Only her cheeks gave testimony of the rapid pulsing of her heart.

"If you prefer it," he replied noncommittally. Twisting



a length of rattan he bound the matting to the bamboo beams.

"We'll place the light here," she declared, calmly indicating where she desired it. "If you'll move the table, please!"

He did as bidden.

"Before we retire," she announced, "there are a few questions I desire to ask."

## CHAPTER V

### DISCLOSURES

THE man smiled at her whimsically. He wore a pathetic air of dutiful submission. Tall and of fine physique, he was a magnificent specimen of manhood—six feet three, at least, and admirably proportioned. Grace decided he had difficulty in assuming a pose of humility. His strong, masterful chin, his steel-gray eyes, gleaming beneath bushy eyebrows, and the ridge of his finely chiseled nose declared more eloquently than words that he was a man accustomed to command.

"I'm ready to answer any question that you may ask," he declared humbly.

"In the first place, what of Vincent and Violet? What fate has overtaken them?"

Reassured by her rescuer that Ah Sing would hold but not kill them, she went on:

"In the next place, you might introduce yourself. You appear to have the advantage in knowing my name."

Her eyes lifted in time to catch his amused smile.

"My name was not included in the passenger list for reasons of state," he replied. "It is Peter Gross."

He looked at her curiously, as though wondering what effect his admission might have. The corners of her mouth twitched a trifle, but otherwise she gave no sign.

"I am very happy to make your acquaintanceship, Myn-heer Gross," she replied with mock demureness.

His brow corrugated with a puzzled expression.

"You didn't realize that I had guessed who you were, Mr. Gross?" she inquired roguishly.

"I was under that impression," he replied. "Who told you?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Intuition, I suppose,"

she declared. "Mr. Bright described you to me. He mentioned your stature in particular. There are not many men in these parts that answer his description."

"My Brobdingnagian proportions!" Peter Gross exclaimed in mock dismay. "They are always betraying me. Does John Bright suspect also?"

"You heard what he said," she replied. "You were on the bridge." Her tone was wholly noncommittal, but there was no mistaking the implication. He was suspected of eavesdropping.

"Yes, I heard," he acknowledged frankly. "It was embarrassing to be forced to listen to such highly flattering remarks concerning oneself, as Mr. Bright made, but unfortunately there was no way out of it. I was taking the captain's trick on the bridge and could not leave until he returned. You mustn't pay any attention to what Mr. Bright said, however. I assure you that I am very ordinary clay."

"That explains it," Grace remarked with relief. "You know, I was quite sure, even before that, that you were Peter Gross. You carried yourself so like a sailor, and any one could see from the manner of the officers of the packet toward you that you were a person of distinction. But I couldn't understand why you remained on the bridge when we were discussing you."

"I came on board under an assumed name, as a trader who had but recently come to the Sundas," Peter Gross explained. "The governor-general deemed it advisable, for certain reasons I am not at liberty to disclose. Of course the crew knew—most of them are personal acquaintances. They were warned to keep silence. But I am a difficult subject for disguise."

Grace looked relieved. The one unpleasant feature of his conduct, which she had been unable to understand, was now explained, and she felt thoroughly at her ease with him. He responded to her merry laughter with a smile and a steady glance that indicated his readiness to submit to her further inquisition.

Her face assumed a more serious expression. There was a note of anxiety in her voice as she asked:

"While we were out there, in the sea, you remarked that other lives than ours depended on our getting safely to shore. What did you mean by that statement?"

She waited breathlessly upon his reply. He smiled reassuringly.

"I meant that we may be able to help those who survive on the Zuyder Zee," he declared.

"Is there a chance?" she asked eagerly.

"Every chance in the world," he assured—"particularly for your friends. I left them in their cabins with the doors locked and bolted. I saw to that myself. That is why Mr. Brady did not come to your assistance."

"But why—" she asked, puzzled. Her brow contracted with a frown.

"You mustn't censure him or me," he declared. "I assure you I acted for the best. In fact I did the only thing that offered a possible chance for us all to escape. The pirates will harm no one who does not resist them. They will take those who are left on the ship captive, but will do them no harm. If I had permitted Mr. Brady to come to your aid he might have done any number of foolish things and gotten his skull split as a consequence. He could not possibly have swum to shore, for I recollect hearing him remark that he was an indifferent swimmer. So I bundled him into his stateroom and locked him in."

Peter Gross smiled whimsically. "He put up an awful fight, to be sure, but he wasn't quite big enough. These huge bones with which nature has endowed me are sometimes useful."

Grace could conceive the picture of the elegant and slightly built Brady in the hands of such a one as Peter Gross. She did not question the resident's statement that Vincent had fought—she knew he had plenty of courage—but in dealing with Peter Gross he was as helpless as a terrier against a mastiff. It was a comforting thought, nevertheless, that he had made an effort to reach her. His absence during those harrowing moments when the pirates were acquiring possession of the Zuyder Zee had given her many a fierce and silent pang during the hours that had followed. She knew his innate chivalry,

she knew that he would not desert Violet with danger threatening, but she knew, too, the latter's wiles and clever artifices.

Violet Coston, she was aware, was one of that unfortunate type of women that demands adulation from every male who comes within the range of her eyes, in whom the desire for conquest never palls, and whose inordinate selfishness makes no allowance for the claims of any living creature, not even those bound to her by the closest ties of relationship. It was as natural for her to play the coquette with Vincent Brady as for a rose to open its petals to the sun. She had done it every hour of their leisurely voyage around the world. Vincent's betrothal to her stepdaughter was no obstacle to the accomplishment of her desire.

Serene in her confidence in Vincent's loyalty and his love for her, Grace had watched her stepmother's petty artifices with supreme indifference and occasional amusement. Of late, however, she was beginning to fear that Violet Coston's clever campaign was bearing fruit. There are few men able to withstand the continuous assault of a beautiful woman's blandishments.

Grace's thoughts recurred to the present outstanding fact—Vincent and Violet prisoners of the Malay pirates. The lines of anxiety formed once more on her smooth, white brow.

"Why are you so positive that the pirates will do no harm to those who do not resist?" she asked.

"To explain that," he replied, "I must tell you a matter that, up to this time, has been held confidential by the colonial office. I must therefore caution you to say nothing of this when we reach Bulungan. I have just come from Batavia. I was called there to a conference by the *gouverneur-general*. His excellency, De Jonkeer Adriaan Adriaanszoon Van Schouten. It was in regard to this Dordrecht affair which Mr. Bright related to you."

"Yes?" she inquired.

"It is true that the Dordrecht was captured by pirates. I presume they took it in much the same manner that they surprised us. It is a clever stratagem, and

worthy of so astute and cunning a leader as Ah Sing. He is a dangerous man, the most dangerous man in the entire East.

"Contrary to his previous policy, Ah Sing did not butcher his prisoners when he took the Dordrecht. He killed those who resisted and took the rest captive. He has hidden them in one of his strongholds, some rendezvous along this coast, whose whereabouts we do not know as yet. He demands a ransom for them, a large sum of money. He asks ransom, both from the government and from the relatives of those whom he has taken."

"Will the ransom be paid?" Grace asked.

"That is a state secret which I am unable to disclose," Peter Gross replied gravely.

"I beg your pardon!" Grace flushed. "You feel sure, however, that those on board the Zuyder Zee will be treated in the same manner?"

"I am positive."

Grace thought of the hideous painted face that met hers at the rail of the vessel as she was about to spring overboard, and she shuddered. Vincent might be safe, but what of Violet, fragile, tender Violet, accustomed to every luxury? What would happen to her in the hands of these savages, and worse than savages—creatures who acknowledged no restraint on their bestial passions save superior force? The horror of it numbed her. Of course, Vincent would fight to defend Violet. He was no coward. But Peter Gross's assurance was a pitifully slender reed upon which to build hope for the life and safety of those she loved.

The resident looked at her fixedly. He saw her tense and drawn features and the white line of her lips, and he read her thoughts.

"Miss Coston, what I have told you may not appear very convincing," he stated gravely. "But there is one fact that you must consider. Your friends are not in the hands of Dyak, Bajau, or Malay pirates. They are in Ah Sing's hands. The Chinaman, I grant, is cruel and ruthless, devoid of all moral sense, and a veritable fiend in human form. He is almost all the evil that men say

of him. But his vice is avarice. For the sake of gold he will do anything. Place the fairest woman in the world beside a stack of gold pieces, and let him choose, and he will select the gold instantly.

"Furthermore, his will is absolute law to these savages. They would sooner think of cutting their own throats than of disobeying him. They fear him with a fear that is more than mortal. They know that his vengeance never ceases, and follows those who have opposed him to the farthest ends of the earth." Peter Gross smiled. "In fact," he declared, "I think I owe much of my own wholly unwarranted reputation among the natives largely to the fact that I have thus far successfully escaped his solicitous efforts to put me under the sod."

"Ah!" It was a sigh of relief. "You feel certain that he will hold Mrs. Coston and Mr. Brady for ransom? We will pay anything within reason. I will cable our bankers as soon as we reach a cable station."

"I trust you will be guided by me in this matter, Miss Coston," Peter Gross requested.

"Do you think we should refuse to pay the ransom?" Grace asked anxiously.

"We can decide that question better when a demand for ransom is made upon us," Peter Gross evaded. He smiled. "We are hardly out of the woods ourselves as yet."

"I shall surely consult you, Mr. Gross," Grace replied demurely. "I'm sure you wouldn't permit me to do anything rash." A roguish twinkle lit her eyes.

Peter Gross's features remained inscrutable.

"Thank you, Miss Coston," he replied gravely.

"The inquisition is over for to-night," she said. "Good night."

"Good night."

Grace retired to dream dreams of a young giant who was having a dreadfully serious time offering chairs to young ladies and getting out of their sight before they had an opportunity of thanking him.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE GARRISON AT FORT WILHELMINA

**P**ATRICK ROUSE, secretary to his excellency, Myrheer Peter Gross, resident, came to Bulungan with no misguided notions on the nature and disposition of its brown-skinned inhabitants. After living there two years he had less—which may sound Irish but is the exact truth.

Two years had wrought a marvelous change in the irresponsible, fiery shocked and fiery tempered youth who had accompanied Peter Gross on the latter's mission of pacification. The imminence of death, and the constant contact with savages who were conquered but not subdued, had sobered him. His merry blue eyes held a knowledge and keen perception they had not possessed before. He had not gained weight, the work had been too hard for that, but a certain plumpness of youth that he had brought with him from Java had been replaced by the rough corrugations of steel-cord muscles. In short, responsibility had made a man of Paddy.

His particular function was the reduction of verbose reports of the Dutch *controlleurs*, as well as those of the various native potentates, kjais, rajas, datus, gustis, and dessa headman to their small content of fact. It goes without saying that his mill ground more chaff than wheat.

The *controlleurs* under the new régime were faithful clerks, whatever their other deficiencies. They turned in accounts of their monthly activities which vied in length and prolixity with the *Congressional Record*. As specimens of the leisurely style of Dutch writing they were unexcelled. But to an exuberant young man of twenty-one,



whose thoughts ran on potting tigers and crocodiles, they were a nightmare and a torture.

The volume of petitions and protests from the native chieftains was appalling. When civilization came to Bulungan a far-sighted raja conceived the idea of hiring a stranded Dutchman to act as his clerk. His example was promptly imitated by the lesser dignitaries. A *kjai* without an *orang bland*, a grand vizier, became as uncommon as a *kjai* without breeches. To the credit of these poor derelicts it must be said that they went to work with the indefatigable industry characteristic of the race, and kept the civil authorities busy replying to their correspondence.

On the morning Peter Gross was expected to return to Bulungan, Paddy was hopelessly mired in a lengthy epistle from the Raja of Pah Patang, whose domains had been invaded by rattan-hunters from the neighboring principality of Kutei. The raja did not complain particularly about the theft of his rattan—he had his own methods of securing redress. But he did protest in language prolix that revealed no small measure of irritation that the thieves had crossed the small stream which marked the boundaries of his domain without making the customary gift to the *hantu token*, the guardian spirit of its waters. As a consequence, the raja alleged, the spirits had been offended and had sent a visitation upon him in the shape of a big bull crocodile which had eaten up his favorite wife.

Paddy read thus far and laid the letter aside with a tired sigh. Digging into the mass of correspondence that blanketed the old, quaintly carved rosewood desk, he located a silver gong which he struck sharply with the heel of his hand. As the silvery accents tinkled through the building he leaned back in his chair and gazed at the portrait of a fierce old gentleman in doublet and hose, with a thin, pinched face and sharply pointed Vandyke beard, who frowned down upon him.

"We think we're colonizers," he remarked, addressing the portrait. "But after all, we've got to take our hats off to you. You came into this country when it was abso-

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lutely raw, and you built an empire. I'm beginning to think that, after all, your system is right: One white life is worth a thousand native."

A finely formed Malay lad, whose face was stamped with the fierce pride of his race, glided within.

"I want you to run over to the fort with a message for Captain Carver, Ali," Paddy announced.

"*Als je blijft, mynheer,*" the lad remarked deprecatingly, "Captain Carver is not yet here. The soldiers have been on the march. I hear them coming now."

The tramp of military feet was borne faintly along the silent air and floated into the darkened room through the blinds. Paddy rose from his chair and stepped to the window.

They were coming—the army of Bulungan. Twenty-three white men, soldiers of fortune, twenty-three of the tiny army Peter Gross had taken with him when he left Java to conquer Bulungan by righteousness and fair dealing. Twenty-three to win an empire. Cortez and his conquistadores had not set out on a more fantastic enterprise. Yet the miracle had been achieved.

The crunch of their feet on the coral-shell highway that wound upward from the level tableland of the *plein* to the elevation on which the fort stood came clearly now to Paddy's ears. They were marching slowly and wearily, like men utterly exhausted. As he looked out between the trees and the heavy shrubbery of the gardens for a glimpse of the column, the terrific glare of the near-zenith sun blinded him for a moment. A gust of hot, dusty air beat his face. He felt a sense of suffocation and unconsciously loosened his collar.

A screen of matonia palms with nipahs between, and a hedge of tall-growing rhododendrons beyond, along the border of the highway, shut off Paddy's view of the approaching troops. It was not until they were nearly opposite the house that he caught a fair glimpse of them. They were toiling doggedly along, their faces streaked with perspiration and glowing like hot coals. Some of them winced as their blistered feet came in contact with the scorching highway. They had marched twenty miles

that morning under a Bornean sun with scarcely a breath of air stirring—an achievement that would have killed any unacclimated troops. Their faces bore the look of men who had suffered and knew how to suffer without flinching. Paddy's heart bled for them.

"Damn Carver!" he exploded. "There's no limit to what he asks of a man."

A company of Javanese colonials in gray uniforms—a hundred strong—marched back of the white men. It was evident that they, too, were near the limit of their powers, although a tropic origin gave them greater powers of resistance.

Paddy watched the column round the curve in the road and proceed to the fort, a quarter of a mile distant. His eyes turned toward the bleak drill-ground or *plein*, northwest of the residency building, lying drab and verdureless under the sun's pitiless glare. Here and there a lone tamarind threw a bit of grateful shade.

A bit of errant breeze romped in from Bulungan bay and scurried across the expanse. It lifted a great cloud of orange-brown dust thick as a fog. As the breeze died away the dust settled slowly back upon the parched *plein* that blinked placatingly at the offended heavens.

"It's hell!" Paddy exclaimed bitterly. "If it wasn't for Peter Gross I'd leave this damned country in a minute."

"Don't you owe hell an apology?" a dry voice asked. Paddy turned swiftly.

"I beg your pardon, captain!" he remarked stiffly. "I didn't notice you come in."

Captain Carver sank wearily into a broad-seated rocker of bamboo and rattan. His features were gaunt to asceticism. His cheeks burned hectically under their coat of tan. The tired look, habitual to white men who are fighting a losing fight with jungle fever, was in his eyes. But his thin, firm chin and compressed white lips bespoke an indomitable will and an unconquerable spirit that yielded to no odds.

"Your boy informed me as we were going by that you wished to see me," he explained.

The captain's exhausted appearance caused a certain

relenting in Paddy's heart. "You'll want some refreshment," he observed. He reached for the gong.

"No, thanks—not just now." The captain's gesture stayed Paddy.

A wisp of vagrant breeze, scented with the salts of ocean and the sweet smells of Celebes sandalwood, drifted in through the open blinds and rustled the hangings. Captain Carver mopped his brow and breathed deeply.

"You're a lucky dog, Paddy!" he exclaimed enviously. "This is the coolest spot in Bulungan."

Paddy grunted non-committally.

"Been busy this morning?" Carver asked, glancing at the rosewood desk cluttered with papers.

"Passably," Paddy replied curtly.

"Anything new?"

"Nothing in particular."

Captain Carver glanced at him quizzically. The lad was evidently in a surly mood. Something was wrong, for Paddy was the last man in the world to carry a grouch—in fact he was the life of the camp. Captain Carver knew him too well to ask questions, for Paddy had a quick temper and resented intrusion into his private affairs. Given time, however, he generally relieved his mind. The captain wisely, therefore, attempted to divert the conversation.

"You haven't heard whether Koyala has come in from the mountains?" he asked.

"I haven't. Have you heard anything?" The lad's tone indicated awakening interest.

Captain Carver shook his head. His gaze wandered through the open window and thoughtfully surveyed the panorama without.

"It's a month since she's been here," he observed. "I don't like it—under present conditions."

"Peter Gross is away to Batavia," Paddy remarked.

"I don't recall that she's ever cut us dead before when he was absent," Carver rebuked.

"She's probably priestessing up in the hills," Paddy replied with the air of one to whom the subject is not of much interest.

Carver brushed a hand over his fevered brow. "I wish she were here," he ejaculated fervently.

"Are the *bruinevels* kicking up?" Paddy inquired with sudden access of interest.

"Everything's quiet so far. But to-morrow's pasar day. We'll have the ruffraff of the whole residency here, and all the scum of the five seas. I'd feel safer if she were here to keep us advised."

"Peter Gross will be back to-morrow," Paddy replied. "He's coming on the Zuyder Zee."

"I hope to Heaven he is!" Carver exclaimed fervently.

"I don't," Paddy acknowledged frankly. "Things are in the deuce of a mess with me. I've got stuff here that will keep me going for a week steady. These datos and rajas and their confounded Dutch clerks are getting into more squabbles every day. They've asked me for enough improvements to bankrupt the whole Dutch government. I'm tempted to burn the whole batch of litter."

A look of concern came upon the commander's features. "Don't let tiger and rhinoceros-hunting interfere too much with business, Paddy," he suggested gently. "Some of this stuff appears trivial to us. We haven't much sympathy with their superstitions. But indifference to their complaints, or a careless word, can stir up a fire that five thousand men couldn't put out."

"They had an experience two years ago that they won't forget in a hurry," Paddy replied cock-surely. "We're not going to have much trouble in this locality."

Captain Carver looked at Paddy with eyes that combined the affection of an indulgent father who knows only too well the shortcomings of his child, and the sternness of the soldier.

"Paddy," he warned, "don't crow too loudly. Trouble is a lot nearer us than either of us have imagined. Things are stirring down below, and God knows when the lightning will strike! I learned a few things this morning while we were hiking to Sibau. I wish we'd known them weeks ago, before Peter Gross left.

"Ah Sing is back. He was at the bottom of the Dord-rechter disappearance. He's trying to line up the Dyaks

—and they're wavering. They hold a *bitchara* at the pasar to-morrow. If they decide on war, God knows what will become of us, for the Chinaman has artillery!"

He paused impressively and studied Paddy's face. The lad was staring at the carpet, varying emotions flitting over his features. He raised his head abruptly.

"Why in thunder did you take the boys to Sibau on a day like this?" he demanded indignantly. "They're nearly dead!"

Carver gazed at him steadily. The outburst was typical of the lad. It was wholly natural for him to forget the grave, common danger in order to resent a fancied injury to his friends. Sensing the warm heart back of it, the captain readily forgave him. At the same time he felt the necessity for a stern rebuke.

"Are you asking the question as the resident's secretary, or purely personally?" the captain inquired softly.

Paddy's face fell. "I know I had no business speaking that way," he admitted shamefacedly. "But it isn't right, captain, with the mercury at a hundred and seventeen."

Captain Carver's glance strayed toward the littered desk. Paddy saw him contemplate it and flushed guiltily.

"Do you know, Paddy," the captain remarked softly, "we've had an easy time of it the past two years. Some of this tropic languidness is getting into our blood. We're becoming soft. We're becoming lazy. Twenty miles a day was nothing to us at one time. But now we're blown if we do it. What will happen to us if we are called upon to beat the jungle again?"

He permitted the question to sink in. Paddy offered no reply. His dissatisfaction found vent in the passionate exclamation:

"Curse the country! I wish I'd never seen it! It's a compound of jungle-fever and hell, and not worth one of the good men we've buried here!"

Carver rose and caught the young man's shoulders in his two strong hands. His glance bored deeply into the rebellious eyes turned upward to meet his. Though his face was stern, it was mellowed with a peculiar wistful

expression, for he dearly loved the hot-tempered, impulsive lad.

"Paddy, don't talk like that," he pleaded earnestly. "You're too young to be counting costs. There's an empire here and we're winning it—winning it in spite of all the powers of savagery arrayed against us. You are one of us, Paddy—one of the handful of us that is winning this empire. It's a narrow, rocky road with dizzy drops on both sides, but we can't afford to look aside. We've got to look ahead. And you're young, Paddy—you'll have most of your life ahead of you when we get through conquering the country. Lord, what wouldn't I give to be your age again!"

The captain's hands dropped to his side, and he turned away with lowered head. Walking slowly toward the window he placed his elbow on the sill and, head in hand, gazed long and earnestly at the shimmering *plein*.

Paddy ran his fingers through his fiery shock of curly red hair and blinked. He gazed at the captain with a puzzled frown and blinked again. Carver's tremendous earnestness had somehow dispelled his sense of injury and exalted their joint suffering. Even though the concept was not quite clear to him, he felt himself thrilled, and wondered why.

His glance happened to fall upon the clutter of papers littering his desk. As he gazed a grin of comprehension overspread his features.

"Empire-builders," he snorted *sotto voce*. "An empire of mud and fleas!"

Pulling his chair forward he began rummaging through the pile of accumulated correspondence. Finding the letter he wanted he began the laborious task of its translation. It was the complaint of the raja who had lost a favorite wife to a crocodile because a neighbor's rattan-hunters had failed to appease the guardian spirits of the boundary stream.

Captain Carver glanced over his shoulder at the lad and smiled.

"Youth, youth," he murmured under his breath. "So quickly fired with enthusiasm, so passionate of its ideals.

The lad meant well—a little awkward in expressing himself, that's all. If I were twenty years younger—”

He sighed wistfully. His glance trailed pensively toward the *plein*, where the heat was rising in great, shimmering waves. A moisture gathered in his eyes and his lips quivered with an involuntary contraction of pain. Clenching his fist he fought back the tears and the secret sorrows that gave birth to them.

A shadow projected itself beyond a nearby clump of shrubbery. The captain turned sharply and gazed intently in that direction. The next moment his eyebrows lifted and a look of pleasure illuminated his face.

“As I live, Koyala!” he exclaimed.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE ARGUS PHEASANT'S WARNING

WITH a finger of warning at her lips, the priestess of Bulungan, daughter of Leveque, the French trader, by a Dyak wife, glided into the shadow of the veranda and crouched there for a moment while her eagle eyes scanned the landscape. Apparently satisfied, she rose suddenly and darted through the door which Captain Carver opened for her and as quickly shut. Paddy rose jerkily and thrust back his chair, his mind too intent on the problem before him to grasp the significance of her dramatic entrance.

Captain Carver courteously pulled forward a rocker and offered it to Koyala. She rewarded him with a grateful smile and sank wearily into it. Her bosom was heaving rhythmically from her swift flight up the hillside to the residency building, and her cheeks were flushed with color. Her almost jet-black hair, luxuriant and wavy, yet soft as torn silk, and her richly olive complexion gave her a startlingly Latin appearance—in fact, nine out of ten men would have sworn she was Spanish or Italian.

“What a sensation she'd cause on the boulevards of Paris,” was the thought that came to Captain Carver. From the depth of his heart he pitied her—a woman so wondrously endowed with woman's most cherished gift of beauty, yet so hopelessly cursed with the taint of mongrel blood.

Wisely versed in the caprices of this daughter of two tempestuous races, he restrained his eagerness and waited for her to reveal the object of her coming.

"May I ring for some refreshment, *jonge juffrouw?*" he asked deferentially. "A *liqueur*, or lemonade if the *jonge juffrouw* prefers?"

"Is Ali here?" Koyala inquired in a subdued voice.

"*Ja, juffrouw.*" He nodded significantly toward the rear of the house.

"Nothing, then," Koyala negated. "He must not know that I am here."

"I will get it for you, *jonge juffrouw,*" Paddy declared, rising smartly as he grasped the situation. Koyala smiled her acceptance of his offer.

As he disappeared into the hall, Koyala darted forward to make certain that the door was tightly closed. After listening for a moment to his retreating footsteps, she turned to Captain Carver.

"He will be back in a few moments," she said. "We must talk quickly."

"What has happened?"

"Does Mynheer the Resident return to Bulungan tomorrow on the packet?"

"We expect him."

"O Djath! I am too late." The exclamation was a half-stifled sob.

Carver leaped out of his chair. "What do you mean, *juffrouw?*" he asked in a startled voice.

"Fool that I was," she groaned. "I dallied in the hill while the Yellow Spider spun his web. I wasted precious hours watching the lories build their nests, and chasing the mias in the treetops, and playing hide and seek with the leopards. And all the time Ah Sing was sowing dis-sension among my people and planning this awful deed."

"For God's sake, explain yourself, Koyala," Carver exclaimed.

Her mood changed on the instant from an abandon of grief to a tempest of fury. The brown flood of Dyak blood rushed to her face, her hands clenched, and venom spat from her tongue.

"I will trap that yellow spider, Ah Sing, and rend him limb from limb," she hissed. "I will tear out his eyes; I will rip open his bowels; I will throw his carcass to the

vultures. Ukong Sulung Kowang shall possess his soul in the nethermost caverns of the sea. By the *hantu token*, the spirits of the hills and running water, by Taman Kuring, who dwells on Gunong Lumut, the mount of the dead, I swear it."

Stretched to her full height and standing on tiptoe, with her finger-tips meeting high above her uplifted features, she swore her dreadful oath. Carver shrank back appalled. Well as he knew the fiery passion of this stormy-souled woman, he had never seen her in so awesome a mood as this. As she stood there, quivering in the very intentness of her wrath, she seemed the incarnation of satanic malignancy.

It was Koyala herself who broke the tenseness of the moment. With a quick, catlike movement she sprang back silently to her chair and relaxed her supple body. "He is coming," she whispered warningly.

Paddy opened the door and entered with a tray. On it were two long-stemmed glasses in which ice clinked melodiously against the fragile crystal. As he stepped inside he cast a quick glance at Carver and Koyala. The captain's expression was wholly noncommittal. Koyala welcomed him with a bright smile. She reached forward and took one of the glasses, relaxing again with a purr of lazy contentment.

"Lime juice," Paddy explained, "mixed with other fruit-juices—orange, mangosteen, jambou. Just a nip of Hollands in it. My own invention. Great, isn't it?"

They lifted their glasses and quaffed the liquid experimentally. Koyala nodded a happy approval which sent Paddy into the seventh heaven of delight and drank deeply. Carver was satisfied merely to moisten his lips.

"Couldn't make it more than two without starting Ali's suspicions," Paddy explained, boyish gratification beaming on his face. "Get you another?"

"And a bit of fruit, please. I'm famished," Koyala confessed with a musical laugh. "I made a long journey this morning and didn't wait for breakfast."

"Lord!" Paddy exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of that?" He seized her glass and sped down the corridor.

"There is danger in drinking too much cold water," Captain Carver suggested warningly.

"We of Borneo have vigorous constitutions," Koyala replied. A telltale flush mantled her cheeks. "I do not want the boy to know what I must tell you," she added defensively.

"So I suspected," the captain observed. "We'll have five minutes. Tell me everything as briefly as possible." He drew his chair forward and gazed at her earnestly.

"As you know, Ah Sing is back," she related in a low voice. Her glance fluttered toward the open blinds. Rising quickly, she darted forward and closed them.

"What force has he?" the captain demanded.

"At least fifty proas and tambangans. I do not know how many men. Most of them are Malays and Bajaus, with a few Bugis. Not many of my people have joined them as yet, and those who have are all sea Dyaks."

"Will your people stand firm?"

"Laath of the hill Dyaks is faithful. The Raja Wobanguli says nothing, but I know that he cannot be trusted. The Kjai of Sibau, whom you visited this morning, is one of the worst of your foes."

"The damned hypocrite!" Carver muttered under his breath.

"I followed you to Sibau this morning to warn you," Koyala admitted. "This was the journey I spoke of. I feared they might attack you in the jungle. Some of the younger chiefs urged it, but the Raja Wobanguli said they must wait until they heard from Ah Sing."

"He wants to get all the traders into his net tomorrow," Carver observed grimly.

"Do nothing, I beg you," Koyala pleaded. "Do not stir out of the fort until I give the word."

"I'll wait till I hear from you, *juffrouw*," Carver agreed. "But how are we going to look after Peter Gross and those on board the packet? They'll be in tomorrow."

Koyala's face darkened. The olive became almost a Dyak brown as hate implacable and lust for revenge came into her face.

"*Mynheer kapitein*, you will see no more of Mynheer Gross," she replied in a hoarse, strained voice. "Ah Sing has laid his snare; he will trap him and all on board the Zuyder Zee."

"Impossible!" Carver gasped. "The Zuyder Zee carries cannon."

"But if they hear a cry of distress at night, and see a boat floating with men aboard, will they not stop?" Koyala asked. "And when they stop, divers will foul their propellers, and a mass of proas will surround the ship. Of what use will cannon be?"

"Is that what they'll do?"

"Four hours steaming this side of Cape Kumungun, to-night."

The captain pressed both hands against his brow. The next moment he took them away.

"Is there no chance to warn them?" he cried. "Could you—" He paused hopelessly.

"If I were the bird they have named me, the Argus Pheasant, and could flit over the treetops, I could not reach them in time," Koyala replied despairingly.

Carver rose and strode the room, his hands clasped behind him and his chin on his breast. A rising fury welled within him—fury at the treachery that beset his chief, and fury at the deceit that surrounded them on every side in this land which they had redeemed from savagery and made to blossom like the proverbial rose. They had made its rulers rich beyond their wildest dreams. Yet the robber trait was so inherent in them that they could not wait for the surer returns of agriculture and commerce, but must loot and kill.

The impulse to descend like a thunderbolt on Bulungan, seize Wobanguli as a hostage, and fire the town, seized him for a moment. He sternly crushed it, for the time had not yet come for punitive measures. They could only watch and wait.

If Peter Gross were lost, then Bulungan was indeed lost, for there was none who could take his place and obtain the hold on the natives that he possessed. But a *coup* now would have no effect on the fate of the resi-

dent one way or another, for Ah Sing would sacrifice a dozen Wobangulis to secure his coveted revenge on Peter Gross. But Fort Wilhelmina must be held, or the whole residency would be lost.

He turned to Koyala, decision written on his face.

"Is there anything else?" he asked.

"I have told you all," she replied.

"When is the question of peace or war to be decided?"

"It is practically decided now. The chiefs meet tomorrow, after the *pasar*. They will wait until a swift proa has brought news of the success of Ah Sing's attack on the packet. If the Zuyder Zee is taken I know that most of the chiefs will fall in line, hill Dyak as well as sea Dyak. Wobanguli will commit no active act of disloyalty until he knows that Ah Sing has made good his *coup*. He has a long head and takes no chances."

"His overcautiousness may save us the residency," Carver reflected. To Koyala he said:

"His Excellency, Mynheer Gross, may be taken prisoner. There's always the chance. If he is, you may be able to do him some good. You have some influence with Ah Sing. Do you know where the Chinaman's headquarters are?"

"I may be able to find them."

"If you could save Peter Gross, you would do a great thing for Bulungan. His life is worth more than a thousand men to us. We'll take care of ourselves here somehow."

Koyala leaped to her feet, her cheeks glowing. Hope dawned in her eyes, and her face was transfigured; it held the look that a woman keeps for but one man in all the world. Captain Carver saw it and turned away.

"I go, *mynheer kapitein*," Koyala announced in low, thrilling tones. Like a page touched by the accolade, she sprang to the window and scanned the landscape with eager eyes that missed not the smallest detail.

"You must dine with us," Captain Carver interposed

"You have a long trip before you; you will become faint."

"The feet travel swiftly when the heart is light," Koyala replied gayly, darting to the door. She opened it swiftly, glided across the veranda, and disappeared into a cluster of rhododendrons. Flitting through the shrubbery with the swiftness of a leopard, she reached the shelter of the hedge along the highway. Running low and silently like a cat, she vanished behind a clump of tamarinds. Only a few leaves stirring had marked her passage.

"Bintang Burung, the Argus Pheasant!" Captain Carver exclaimed. "She's well-named; a true child of the jungle. White in appearance and pure white in soul, but Dyak in disposition, and Dyak in her capacity for hate. Gad, how she can hate!"

There was a tiny flash of color in the distant jungle. Had he not been looking for it Carver would not have seen it.

"On her way," he murmured to himself. "On her way to Peter Gross." He stared at the tropic forest, and his lips pressed together in a thin, white line.

"Damn you, Leveque!" he swore silently, grinding his fist in his palm. "A thousand years in hell won't punish you for the sin of bringing such a girl into the world by a Dyak mother!"

The door opened discreetly, and Paddy's red head appeared over a heavily loaded tray. He peered about curiously.

"Where's Koyala?" he asked.

"She's left," Carver replied quietly.

The lad's face fell. "What's the idea?" he asked dejectedly. "I've made up a pippin of a rice table."

"She remembered an appointment," Carver returned. "She left me to make her excuses."

"If that's the case, I suppose we'll have to lunch alone," Paddy observed with a poor show of cheerfulness.

"Thanks!" Carver replied. "I really haven't much of an appetite. And I must be getting back to the fort."

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Pressing his broad-brimmed straw helmet down on his forehead he passed through the door and walked slowly down the lane. Paddy watched his sluggish progress up the hillside until Carver disappeared from view.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he ejaculated to the gentleman in doublet and hose who frowned down from a frame above his desk.



## CHAPTER VIII

### IN THE JUNGLE

LAVING her hands in pure spring water that trickled from the rocks into a natural bowl of pure white sand, Grace Coston smiled upward at Peter Gross. The sun was about an hour high. She had just finished scolding him for letting her sleep so soundly. With her hair flowing freely about her shoulders, her rounded arms glowing red under the vigorous punishment she was giving them, and her eyes sparkling blue through a dash of cold water into her face, she was altogether a charming picture, Peter Gross thought. He wanted to tell her so. The classical simile of a Naiad came to his mind, but he instantly rejected it. She was too splendidly vital for such a comparison. "You're my notion of an American girl!" he exclaimed in ungrudging admiration, and promptly experienced a sinking of the heart at such a familiarity.

Somehow she did not find it so. Her eyes twinkled brightly.

"I hope you didn't run six thousand miles away from the United States to keep out of sight of American girls, Mr. Gross," she replied.

"I know one American girl I might run six thousand miles to reach," he hazarded.

"La, la!" Grace exclaimed to herself under her breath. "How our bashful swain is getting on!" To him she said:

"What has the commissary department to say for itself this morning, Mr. Gross? I assure you I have a prodigious appetite."

From his six feet four he grinned down amiably

upon her. It was her first opportunity to observe him closely without the embarrassment of prying eyes. "A big, good-natured, wholesome boy," was her verdict. "Too good at times, if his face tells the truth."

"Come and see," he replied to her challenge.

"And Nathanael saith unto him, 'Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?'" Philip saith unto him: "Come and see," she quoted.

"If I remember rightly, the Israelite was treated to a surprise," Peter Gross observed, smiling.

"He found his person and reputation well known," Grace replied. "I presume," she asked mischievously, "you claim the same omniscience?"

"To be quite truthful," Peter Gross replied evenly, "I knew all about you long before you knew I existed, Miss Coston."

"Mercy!" she exclaimed. "You must have been dreadfully curious?" It was quite a delicious sensation this—flirting on a fair summer's morning in a trackless jungle with a handsome stranger—such an innocent boy!

"It wasn't exactly curiosity," Peter Gross frankly confessed. "The captain was in doubt whether Mr. Brady would adopt his suggestion and stay on board at Bulungan. We were speculating what steps might be necessary to keep your party on the ship."

He spoke with such seriousness that Grace could not restrain a smile of amusement. At the same time she felt a tinge of disappointment—she had expected a more romantic acknowledgment.

"I'm frankly starved," she announced. "Let's have breakfast."

He parted the screen of jungle for her and led her to a secluded glade. In the center, suspended from an overhanging mangrove branch, hung a legless table made from strips of bamboo and reeds. Neatly arranged upon it were bananas, green coconuts, a strange fruit which Grace did not recognize, and four small fish freshly fried.

"Where did you find all these?" she asked. "Fish,

too! Surely you haven't done it all yourself?" Her face was eloquent.

"I was up at dawn," he explained. "To one who has lived in the jungle it is fairly simple. I caught the fish in the lagoon with a crooked thorn and a strip of vegetable fiber, with a fat grub for bait. The fruit was growing near by. I made the table while the fish were frying."

She gave him a glance of mute admiration. These were difficulties she could comprehend—and he had conquered them. A pleasurable exaltation filled Peter Gross; he was elated at her warm appreciation of his modest efforts.

"Why did you take the trouble to hang your table in a tree?" she asked. "Why not put it on legs?"

He pointed to a wavy red line on a nearby fallen tree-trunk. It came up from the ground on one side of the trunk and went down on the other. It seemed to be alive.

"Do you know what that is?" he asked.

"I don't. What is it?"

"Red ants," he declared. "If I had set the table on legs we would have had a swarm of them on it, and your breakfast would have disappeared long since. These little fellows will find it even now if we give them time enough. Shall we breakfast?"

Grace needed no further urging. The fish were excellent. Their eyes met appreciatively.

"What is this?" she asked, picking up an oval-shaped fruit like a coconut with a green, spiny surface.

He cut it with his knife, exposing five cells filled with a satin-white pulp and thrust it toward her.

She lifted a portion daintily and half doubtfully.

"Faugh!" she exclaimed, thrusting it away ere it reached her lips. "It smells abominably."

"It's a food fit for the gods," Peter Gross declared warmly, helping himself to a generous portion of the thick, creamy custardlike pulp. "This is the durian, Miss Coston—Borneo's finest gift to the world, a fruit

unpleasant to the nostrils, but a delight to the palate. If eaten once it is relished ever afterward."

Grace Coston possessed to an nth degree the inestimable quality of gameness so highly prized in American womanhood. A challenge to her was like a tempting fly to an unwary trout, her ardent soul soared to meet it. Without hesitation she took a portion of the noisome smelling fruit and conveyed it to her mouth. Peter Gross watched her amusedly as she masticated with painful deliberation.

"It's not so bad," she announced finally. Both laughed.

"Try it again," he urged. "You'll find it delicious now that you have established an acquaintance."

"It is really good," she declared with gusto a few minutes later. "It has a peculiar flavor, I presume that like many foreign edibles, one must learn to appreciate it." Her voice held all the pleasure of a child making an enjoyable discovery.

"That is the verdict of every one who has the courage to distrust his nose and become acquainted with the real merit of the durian, Miss Coston," Peter Gross replied. "The Dyaks prize it above all other fruits. They preserve it in jars for months during the hottest weather, but the odor then becomes so strong that I have never been able to eat it."

"I was under the impression that evil smells and unpleasant tastes were nature's warning against unwholesome fruit," Grace observed.

"The rule is not an infallible one, Miss Coston. Nature is an imp—she delights in motley and dresses her richest treasures at times in the coarsest textures. We must learn to know her caprices."

He rose. "And now," he added, "if you have finished breakfast we will begin our journey."

He cut down the improvised table and concealed it in a clump of cogon grass. The remains of their breakfast he tossed into the reeds where the red ants would soon dispose of them.

Fifteen minutes later they were peering carefully

through a heavy screen of mangroves and palmetto growth over the rolling expanse of the Celebes Sea. Maghalien Island lay to the south of them, and a bold headland projected to the north. After a lengthy scrutiny of the shore-line Peter Gross appeared satisfied. He concentrated his attention upon a swift-sailing proa about a quarter of a mile out to sea. It held ten occupants, evidently natives. They were clad in the aborigine Dyak costume: a bright colored chawat with a wicked-looking padang thrust through the belt into a sheath made of palm leaves. A chaplet of leaves a meter wide, like a merry widow hat, protected their heads from the sun. No one but the *jurumuddi* at the rudder was paying any attention to the navigation of the craft. The others were lolling about in various recumbent attitudes, smoking or chewing betel, with the exception of one who was industriously producing a monotonous sequence of weird and piercing sounds from his reed *kaludi*. The craft was hung with streamers and paper pennants.

"On their way to Bulungan to report their capture," Peter Gross observed grimly under his breath.

"Couldn't we do something to help our friends?" Grace implored.

"The best service we can render your friends and all those on the Zuyder Zee who survived is to make our way to Bulungan as rapidly as possible," Peter Gross replied. "We can do nothing alone. In fact we shall be fortunate if we escape, for even now they may have searching parties along the beach. You must not forget that we were observed while swimming to the shore."

Grace sighed. "Of course you are right," she acknowledged.

"Then if you are ready we will take the trail."

They trudged along in silence on a narrow but fairly well defined path. After approximately a half-hour's journey the resident turned sharply to the right into a cluster of wild rice and cogon grass. The break in the trail was so indistinct that Grace did not notice it until her companion parted the reeds. A few minutes later they found themselves in a network of creepers and

interlacing vines so thickly woven together than progress was almost impossible. Peter Gross parted these with care and strove to make them fall back naturally after they had passed through. It was muddy under foot, and despite her precautions Grace twice stepped in ooze that went over her ankles. She held her skirt tightly to prevent it from being caught in the thorns and briars, but her arms and face were badly scratched and cut by the long spikes.

"Do you know," she remarked plaintively, "following a jungle trail isn't at all what I dreamed it would be? I've always had a passion for exploring. I've dreamed for years of cutting my way through the jungle fastnesses of Borneo—always Borneo, because that seemed to me the most absolutely primitive country on earth. I fancied myself cutting my way through the untouched cane with a good guide leading the way, and coming upon wonderful orchids and marvels of nature no botanist ever saw before. It was so easy—in my dreams. I seemed to float along light as a fairy. But this jungle is as bad as a barbed-wire fence, and I vow that my feet weigh a ton apiece." She glanced ruefully at her slippers encrusted with sodden mire.

Peter Gross gave a whimsical glance at his own shoes, equally weighted with clay and swamp-soil.

"Bornean mud," he observed philosophically, "is the most affectionate of God's creations. Vermin will leave you under proper ministrations, but the mud of Borneo never. It clings with the gentle persistence of a chronic borrower, it is as ineradicable as India ink, and as omnipresent as the mosquito. Were I an artist striving to depict Borneo I should paint a colossal savage struggling knee-deep in mire."

Grace laughed. "Is the entire island a swamp?" she asked.

"There is a water-shed," Peter Gross declared. "It lies far to the north and separates the Dutch possessions from the British. The *Tohen Batu*, the natives call it. It is largely volcanic, and for this reason the Dyaks ascribe their gods and familiar spirits residence there.

There are few people living in the uplands. Your true Bornean loves his mud. Swamp and jungle are his habitat."

Peter Gross's reference to the *Tohen Batu* caused a chord of memory to vibrate in Grace Coston's mind. She recollected that Mrs. Derringer had stated that Koyala, the "Argus Pheasant," made her home in the mountains.

"I presume the uplands are very sacred places to the Dyaks," she remarked casually. "Are there very many temples there?"

"Some," Peter Gross acknowledged. "Several of the most important are in that locality."

"Is this where the high priestess of the Dyaks—what is her name? Koyala?—makes her home?"

"She has a temple there. But she lives everywhere. The jungle is her home and you are apt to find her at Pasir or Bulungan as at the *Tohen Batu*."

"They say she is very beautiful," Grace remarked. She stole a curious glance at the resident.

"That is true," Peter Gross replied candidly and quite impersonally. "She is unfortunately one of the most beautiful women in the East Indies. That is her greatest misfortune."

"I have never before heard beauty referred to as a misfortune for a woman," Grace observed, watching her companion narrowly.

"For a woman of her nativity it is," he replied quietly, and with finality.

Grace perceived that further inquiry along this line would be unwelcome. But the doubts that had risen in her heart through Mrs. Derringer's innuendos, doubts that had persisted in spite of Peter Gross's considerate conduct during the past twelve hours, were wholly dissipated.

They trudged along in silence for a time, each busy with his own thoughts. Crossing a tiny water-course Peter Gross remarked:

"We are getting near the river. We must hide our trail when we reach it, for we may be followed. I

have no doubt that Ah Sing knew I was aboard, for he has spies everywhere. Missing me, he will undoubtedly institute search. He may assume I was drowned, but I doubt it. Ah Sing does not assume when the means of securing positive knowledge are at his command."

"Let us hurry," Grace urged.

"There is no need for haste as yet," Peter Gross replied. "We must conserve our strength till we need it. It will take them some time to pick up the trail, and when they do, they will not make rapid progress. I have left a few riddles behind us which their most accomplished trailers will find some difficulty in solving, I believe. These should delay them sufficiently to enable us to get to Naioh's hut on the opposite bank of the river ahead of us. Naioh is friendly and will help us."

After a pause Peter Gross continued whimsically:

"Ah Sing does not know how nearly he bagged a far bigger prize than the one that is slipping out of his fingers. His Excellency de Jonkheer Van Schouten Governor-General of Oost-Indie, was almost a fellow voyager with us on board the Zuyder Zee. He had quite decided to go, but his adviser, Mynheer Sachsen, dissuaded him. It was quite a severe disappointment to the governor."

"He is the gentleman whom people call the *Kemphaan*, is he not?" Grace inquired.

"That is almost *lese majesty*, Miss Coston," Peter Gross replied, smiling. "People call him the 'Gamecock' behind his back, but there's none who has the temerity to speak that word in his hearing. He is a midget of a man, but a fire-eater! One must meet him to appreciate his quality. Few dare oppose his will. Mynheer Sachsen, his adviser, is the only man for whose opinion he cares a picayune. The military authorities, who generally lord it over the civil in the colonies because of the frequent necessity to employ force for the restoration of order, fear him like a pestilence and are careful not to cross him. The Jonkheer Van Schouten drives them like a Spanish muleteer. Gold



braid and pompous manners mean nothing to him. I know that he once tore up an order signed and sealed by the commander-in-chief at The Hague himself. The military clique has tried half a score times to get him cashiered, but Van Schouten has triumphed on every occasion. The government knows that no other living individual can keep the turbulent millions of *Insulinde* under control so well as he, and keep them paying their taxes with regularity, so they swallow his eccentricities and keep him here. Therefore do not judge him by what gossip you may have heard. He is a mite of humanity—but ah, what a heart and what a will he has!"

"It must be embarrassing at times to have such a superior," Grace remarked.

Peter Gross, who had been engaged in stamping down a footing of undergrowth in a swampy spot, paused and straightened.

"Miss Coston," he replied quietly, "I learned as a boy that there is none so high that he has no superior. The highest have their authority from the people whom they serve, and from God. Therefore our common lot is to do our simple duty as it lies before us. That is my simple philosophy of life; that is all I have tried to do. In doing that no man ever finds cause for embarrassment." He returned to his work.

Grace watched his broad back thoughtfully. John Bright's characterization of Peter Gross occurred to her—"God's own messenger." "He was right," she whispered to herself, "the man is wonderful. He sees great truths so clearly."

She mentally contrasted the two men—Ah Sing, the pirate leader, cruel, cunning, ruthless, feared the length and breadth of the archipelago, the incarnation of all the savagery and mysticism of the Orient, and Peter Gross, the great, simple-hearted American, who did his simple duty daily and was content thereby. The struggle between these two was the old, old struggle of East against West, ancient barbarism and superstition against the newer civilization of the Atlantic shores. Who would conquer? she asked herself. And as she asked the

question she reflected how perilously near it was to asking whether God was in His heaven.

"Do you know, Mr. Gross," she inquired, "that Ah Sing has sworn to have your life?"

"You have been told of the kind preparation he has made for a portion of my remains," Peter Gross declared, smiling. "He has made the same preparation for his Excellency, the Governor-General. That is why the Jonkheer Van Schouten, who never permits a foe to retain the offensive, was so eager to go to Bulungan."

"Had he been with us I presume you would have been required to save him first," Grace remarked roguishly.

"I am afraid, Miss Coston, that the Jonkheer would have been compelled to fend for himself," Peter Gross replied gallantly. "It was a trifle to assist you to shore, but to bring his excellency to the beach would have taxed the endurance of a Kanaka. You swim admirably, but I have it on good authority that his excellency swims like a bar of pig-iron."

His tone changed and he continued earnestly: "But I must not give you a wrong impression of the governor. I assure you, he would not have retreated as long as any one was left on the ship. You would have seen his sword in the forefront of the *mêlée*, and I assure you he would have done some execution, for he is reputed to be the best blade in Oost-Indie."

"You imply that the governor would not have left the ship as you did, Mr. Gross," Grace exclaimed indignantly. "You are unjust to yourself. You know you left to save me. And I acted perfectly foolish in the water."

"Because you didn't know me and were naturally afraid," he replied. "Of course I understood. But I don't want you to feel that you called me from a post of duty. I left the ship because my life is not yet my own, but Bulungan's. I have a work here to do. When that is done—perhaps, why then I may settle my account with Ah Sing."

His jaw set grimly and he gazed pensively into the

jungle mazes. Grace waited silently, guessing his thoughts. A parakeet cried shrilly from a neighboring tree and awoke him from his reverie. He attacked the liana with savage energy. Conversation languished as they continued their slow progress through the thick jungle.

As she followed in Peter Gross's footsteps, Grace, stepping on what appeared to be firm earth covered with a mat of tiger-grass and mangrove-leaves, found herself sinking. She threw out her hand instinctively and uttered a cry of dismay. Peter Gross wheeled and caught her, arresting her fall just as she plunged knee-deep into the treacherous quagmire.

She struggled to free herself. The bog gave way beneath her and the ooze rose nearly to her hips. She looked up with a blanched face at Peter Gross.

"Don't struggle," he directed. "Hold yourself perfectly limp and do as I direct."

He searched carefully for solid footing, retaining his grip upon her. Queer, gurgly noises rose from the inky-black morass around them. To Grace they suggested slimy creatures burrowing into its depths. In imagination she experienced the horrible sensation of leeches fastening themselves upon her. It was all she could do to keep herself from struggling frantically to extricate her limbs.

"If you'll lift your arms a trifle," Peter Gross suggested. She did as directed and felt his strong fingers groping for a hold under her arm-pits. They seemed like tentacles of steel as they gripped about her shoulders. His back arched as he exerted his full strength in the effort to lift her.

A racking pain shot through her body. The treacherous mud, so soft and downy when she sank into it, held her like a giant vise. Peter Gross's fingers cut like cables. She felt as though stretched on a rack. The strain was more than her body could bear, and a cry of pain burst from her lips. At that moment the morass reluctantly relinquished its grip and she felt

herself slowly but steadily drawn upward. The mire quaked angrily and great bubbles came to the surface. Peter Gross's arm swung around her waist and lifted her high above the caldron of mud. Then he carefully deposited her on the root of a mangrove-tree.

Exhausted by the strain, Grace clung giddily to the root. The world was whirling dizzily about her and blackness was descending.

"Don't faint if you can help it," Peter Gross counseled anxiously.

His words were a tonic. She rallied and fought back her weakness. Panting, she clung to the root, her body swaying like a lily in the breeze.

He was panting, too. The blood mantled his face, enhancing its natural ruddiness to a deep purple. He wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"That is what I would call a close shave," he announced cheerfully.

"If you had not been here!" she gasped shuddering.

"But I was," he pointed out, smiling. "We're perfectly safe now, so why worry about spilled milk?"

Grace looked at her garments, a mass of dripping mud. A lump formed in her throat.

"Is there a spring anywhere near here?" she asked plaintively.

Peter Gross shook his head. "I'm sorry, Miss Coston," he replied, "but you'll have to wait until we get to the river. It lies about a half mile ahead of us, I think—a forty-minutes' journey through this jungle."

"I don't know how I shall walk it," Grace declared in anxiety, "I've lost a slipper."

"In the mire?"

"Yes."

"If that's the case we'll have to give it up. There's no hope of finding it."

"I can't walk this way," Grace answered. She flushed and confessed: "I'm afraid of snakes."

"I don't intend to let you walk," he replied firmly. "I shall carry you."

"Carry me!" she exclaimed, lifting startled features. "You shall not!" There was a decided emphasis on the negative. A bright flush mantled her cheeks and her blue eyes sparkled rebelliously.

The suspicion of a smile lurked in both corners of Peter Gross's mouth. His eyelids flickered with what under other circumstances might have been suspected as amusement.

"As you say," he agreed with disarming equableness. "If you prefer I can leave you here and go on to Naioh's hut for sandals and a skin of water. It will mean the loss of two hours' time, but it may be that the Dyaks haven't picked up our trail as yet."

His irritating good humor provoked a dangerous spark in her eyes. She felt that he was secretly laughing at her.

"Could you make the journey in two hours?" she demanded.

"In approximately that length of time."

"It would be perfectly safe here?"

Peter Gross shrugged his shoulders. "One never knows," he observed deprecatingly. "The trail hasn't been used in a long time, but of course a Dyak might come prowling along. Besides, there's always the chance of stumbling on a rhinoceros or a buffalo, or an inquisitive mias."

"I am not afraid," she declared haughtily.

He nodded with perfect understanding.

"But I detest snakes."

"There are a lot of snakes in a jungle like this," he observed cheerfully. "Pythons; but the big fellows don't interfere with an adult unless they are dreadfully hungry. They like young pig better. It's the smaller breed you have to keep a sharp eye for—the dun-colored crawlers that look so much like a rotted branch that you can't tell them apart."

She shuddered. He awaited her decision. When she did not speak, he inquired meekly:

"Shall I carry you, Miss Coston?"

Her chin tilted defiantly. "No, thank you, Mr. Gross," she replied sweetly. "I'll wait here until you return."

A flash of admiration came and vanished in Peter Gross's eyes. He appreciated her spirit. His expression swiftly changed, however, and in a voice crisp, curt, and commanding, he declared:

"Let's have done with this nonsense, Miss Coston. I am going to carry you. We are wasting time here that may be precious to those who are now prisoners in Ah Sing's camp."

She sprang down from the mangrove-root. "You can't carry me and cut a way through these brambles, Mr. Gross," she retorted. "I can walk."

His reply was characteristic of the man. Ere she realized what he purposed he had caught her into his arms and lifted her from the ground.

"Put your arms around my neck," he directed sharply.

In meek obedience she obeyed. He glanced at her suspiciously, fearing a trick, but she smiled demurely back. Without a word he began tearing away with his free hand the obstructing creepers that barred their path.

They proceeded in silence for some distance. She strove to help him, although it was awkward. She heard his breath coming faster, for the exertion was telling.

"I am sure I can walk, Mr. Gross," she declared humbly.

"You are under orders," he returned, smiling as he panted.

Looking upward a little later, he surprised a smile of amusement on her features. His glance expressed inquiry.

"I was thinking," she confessed, "what we must do in the event we cannot find sandals at Naioh's hut. Would you carry me all the way to Bulungan?"

Her voice was wholly grave, but there was a hint of roguery in her eyes.

"To San Francisco, if necessary," he replied gallantly.

"Mercy! Isn't that a trifle large contract?"

"I've carried a hundred and thirty pounds in my pack along rougher trails than this."

She looked up startled. He had guessed her weight to the ounce. She was doubtful whether she liked such candor.

"How far are we from the river now?" she inquired hastily to divert the conversation.

"It is only a short distance ahead," he replied. He bent to escape the low-hanging fronds of a pandanus. Hidden in the shade of a tree she glimpsed a bright bit of color.

"Let me down, please," she begged; "just a moment."

He released her, and she stepped carefully forward a few paces, bending down to pluck the flower that had attracted her attention.

"Isn't it beautiful!" she exclaimed ecstatically. "I've never seen an orchid with these shades before."

"It is a new variety," Peter Gross pronounced instantly, "derived from the *Coelogyne*."

"Do you know orchids?" she asked.

"I have a little knowledge of Bornean botany," he acknowledged.

"How fortunate!" she exclaimed. "I adore orchids." They discussed the island's floral wonders until Grace, chancing to look over a cluster of bamboo ahead of them, exclaimed:

"I see the river ahead of us!"

"Not so loudly," Peter Gross cautioned. In an undertone he added: "There may be Dyaks abroad. The rivers are Borneo's principal highways."

He made his way to the edge of the stream with extreme care and glanced to the right and left. Overhead a pair of noisy macaws were having a family jar, to the right a colony of long-nosed apes held a chatter-bee, and in the blue vault of heaven a green-billed gaper darted through the empyrean. A squirrel, industriously engaged in hoarding nuts against the rainy season,

stopped long enough to survey the intruders with a curious eye.

Peter Gross looked first up-stream and then down, his ears alert to catch the faintest dissonance in the jungle harmony. But there was none. Parting the reeds that thickly lined the bank, he gazed long and earnestly at the opposite shore, studying each clump of grasses, each tangle of mangrove-roots, and each cluster of screw-pine with the scrupulous and painstaking care of the pioneer who knows that a single misstep may mean the forfeit of life.

The river was covered with a heavy growth of water-hyacinth. Their thick, leatherly leaves of dull green carpeted the sluggish stream except in its very center, where a listless current flowed. A few of the plants lifted up spikes bearing a pale violet-red flower.

Peter Gross withdrew his hands carefully and permitted the brown reeds to come together again.

"We cannot cross here," he announced.

Grace looked at him inquiringly.

"Crocodiles," he explained succinctly. "They lurk under the hyacinth-pads. We must strike a bit higher up, where there is a sandy ford."

He lifted Grace again and retraced his steps a short distance. Turning to the left, he headed up-stream. The river evidently crooked to meet them, for a few moments later Grace perceived it gleaming through a patch of *Dacrydium* conifers.

"The very place I've been looking for," Peter Gross murmured happily. Observing the same caution as before, he stealthily crept toward the bank and studied both reaches of the stream. Grace started nervously when a disgruntled trogan sharply voiced his dissatisfaction from a neighboring tree, and Peter Gross turned to give her a warning glance. At that instant a paragam, gliding down the narrow avenue above the stream, caught sight of him and shied sharply. He quickly closed the screen of reeds and lay silent for several minutes before he attempted to resume his scrutiny.



"All safe," he murmured at last with satisfaction. "There is no one on the Medara to-day. I feared we might run into hostile tribesmen hastening to the coast, for ill news travels rapidly in Borneo."

Holding Grace in his arms, he plunged into the stream. As his foot touched the opposite shore a slim brown form glided out of the reeds.

"*Salaamat*, master," Naioh, the Bahau, greeted.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE JWELED MOCCASIN

IT was quite obvious that Naioh had been watching them for some time, patiently waiting until they had crossed the stream. A patch of flattened reed showed where he had squatted, and two lengths of sugar-cane sucked dry indicated that he had spent ten minutes or more there. Peter Gross's brow puckered with chagrin. His pride in his woodcraft had suffered a severe blow. It was apparent that all his elaborate precautions to hide his approach had been as transparent as glass to the Bahau, who must have enjoyed himself hugely in the silent native way at the white man's clumsy efforts to conceal his presence. Smoothing his features, he strove to hide his discomforture with the grave ceremoniousness that attends the meeting of men of rank in the Indies.

"Greetings, my blood-brother," he replied sedately to Naioh's expression of welcome. He stooped to rub noses with the native, this being the conventional Dyak salute between peers. Two years before, when Bulungan was rent in twain in the great civil war between the pirates and their adherents and the Dutch government and its loyal tribesmen, Peter Gross and Naioh had opened veins in their respective wrists and signed a pact in each other's blood that was to make them kinsmen and allies forever.

"My brother is like a leopard in the jungle," Peter Gross remarked. "He is silent till he springs."

"My brother is strong like the mias," Naioh complimented in turn. "He tears trees up by their roots when they are in his path."

"I thought I was a better woodsman than that,"

Peter Gross replied, laughing at his own discomfort. "When did you first see me, Naioh?"

"My brother forgets that the pargam fled when she saw him," Naioh replied tactfully, avoiding a direct reply.

Peter Gross started up the path, but Naioh blocked the way.

"My brother has forgotten," he announced.

Peter Gross looked up with a puzzled expression. A grave nod toward the stream reminded him of a forgotten duty. As one admitted to the brotherhood of the Dyak peoples he must observe their custom of placating with a gift the spirit of the stream whose water he had riled. He thrust his hands into his pockets. The only things he found which he could conveniently part with were a coin and a kerchief. While Naioh gravely incanted the customary invocation to the *hantu token*, he threw the coin and square of linen into the water.

"My last kerchief," he observed ruefully to Grace, who was watching the ceremony with frank curiosity.

"Is this Naioh, the native you spoke of?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I presume you will introduce me presently. Will it be sufficient if I offer my hand?"

Peter Gross perceived Grace's apprehension that she would be called upon to rub noses with the Dyak, and smiled amusedly.

"It will not be necessary for me to introduce you," he replied. "The chief is a Moslem, and his religion requires him to affect your non-existence." Naioh's high standing as a believer was attested by the *hadji-tulband*, the Mecca pilgrim's band, which he wore about his forehead.

"That will be perfectly satisfactory," Grace exclaimed with relief.

Peter Gross's eyes twinkled. He perceived how another of her cherished notions of romantic Borneo had gone glimmering.

"Does the chief understand English?" Grace asked in sudden alarm.

"No, but he talks Dutch fluently."

"Then we can converse safely," she remarked happily. "Do you know," she acknowledged, "he positively frightened me. He looked at me so fiercely."

"Nonsense," Peter Gross replied, laughing away her fears. "Naioh is a warrior and a chief; you must expect a stern reception from such as he."

Covertly, however, he stole a careful glance at the native. There was no question but what Naioh scowled blackly upon Grace Coston and resented her presence. Though he affected to despise her alarm, Peter Gross felt no little curiosity as to the source of his ally's evident hostility toward the girl.

"You spoke of a hut," Grace reminded. "Could I have some water, please, and an opportunity to make myself more presentable?"

"Naioh will get you water," Peter Gross replied quickly. He spoke a few words in the Dyak tongue to the native, whereupon Naioh glided into the cane. "The hut is near by," the resident declared. "I will take you to it."

He stepped toward her, but she leaped out of his reach. "Thank you," she replied; "there are too many opportunities for an audience here. I can walk."

The hut was only a few rods distant. It crowned a sandy knoll, a most fortunate location, for such hillocks are scarce in the alluvial flats that form the greater portion of south Borneo. It was built in the conventional Dyak manner, on stilts, although the need for piles was not here so apparent, for the dwelling stood high above the floodline. But next to floods ants are the worst enemies of the Bornean house-builder, and Naioh had constructed his house so that each pile rested in an artificial pool of water—a sure barrier against the little red pests to whom gummed sticks are only a temporary obstacle.

There were no steps, but a ladder of twisted rattan with rungs of bamboo hung down from the door. Peter Gross assisted Grace up the shaky contrivance. The house was gloomy inside, and almost devoid of window-

lights, like most Bornean dwellings, but when her eyes had become accustomed to the dusk Grace gave a cry of pleasure. She had spied a table, a kerosene lamp, and greatest prize of all, a basin and soap!

Naioh's head popped above the level of the floor. He was carrying two gourds of water. Peter Gross relieved him of these, and then the customary greeting between the master of the house and the male member among his visitors had again, perforce, to be performed, with more rubbing of noses.

"You will probably be busy for some time," Peter Gross observed to Grace. "We won't disturb you. In the event you want me, call. I sha'n't be farther than the river-bank."

He addressed a word to Naioh, who promptly leaped down and disappeared into the cane. Peter Gross vaulted after him. Closing the door, Grace retired to one side of the room and began removing her outer garments.

Naioh and the resident walked side by side to the margin of the stream. Neither spoke. Peter Gross's forehead was furrowed in anxious reflection, and Naioh was too proud and well-bred a Bornean to speak before being spoken to. It was not until they were squatted in a clump of palms that Peter Gross broke silence.

"Why does the proa of my brother Naioh tarry in the fens of his native *sungel* when the flags of *pasar* fly over Bulungan?" he asked.

"It came to me by night that harm had come to my brother on the sea," Naioh replied.

Peter Gross perceived that the Dyak chief knew something but would not reveal it without the customary circumlocution of his people in matters of importance. Although eager to ascertain what had transpired on the island since his absence, Peter Gross restrained himself from showing an impolite amount of interest, and began the preamble that precedes the giving of any information among the Sunda Islanders.

"*Mata-ari*, the sun, gleamed red last night," he observed. "Methinks it was he that told thee."

"The secrets of *Mata-ari* are hid from thy brother," Naioh replied mournfully.

"My brother is an offspring of *Bulan*, the moon, for under her light he was conceived and born," Peter Gross observed. "Was it the moon, my brother, that brought the warning of ill to me?"

"The warning of my mother, *Bulan*, fell upon deaf ears, for lo! I did not hear them," Naioh responded sadly.

"*Laut*, the sea, roared a warning to me as I stood on the deck of the ship that smokes," Peter Gross declared. "Her voice is heard in the breaking of the surges."

"Far distant was I from *Laut*, far from the sound of her voice," Naioh lamented, pressing his hands against his temples to evidence his grief.

"Who has *telinga* (ears) like Naioh, and what secrets of a wagging tongue are hid from him?" Peter Gross demanded. "His eye, *mata*, saw, and his ear, *telinga*, heard, and swift as a bird he came to my assistance."

"The Yellow Spider, Ah Sing, spun his web and Naioh saw it not," the Dyak cried remorsefully. "He set the trap for my blood brother and I slept. The night was thick over my eyes and I dreamed that *Bulungan* was at peace, and the *sumpitan* broken, and the spear-head hid, and the *dessas* rich in rice, and our daughters inviolate. And as I slumbered, he came and set his snares." His eyes kindled and he cast a glance of admiration at Peter Gross. "But thou, O my brother, wert too cunning for him; thou didst not tangle thy feet in the web he spread for thee."

His whole being expressed his lively joy and satisfaction at the resident's escape.

"Surely it was not good fortune that caused thee to be here when I crossed the river?" Peter Gross demanded, casting aside subterfuge in his eagerness to learn how matters stood at *Bulungan*.

"Who is it whose eye sees what is done in the deep-

est jungle?" Naioh countered. "Whose ear hears the faintest whisper from the *Tohen Batu* to Coti, from sea to sea? To whom is the labyrinth of jungle mazes as familiar as the windings of this river are to me? Who flits through them with the speed of a falling star?"

"Koyala warned you?" Peter Gross exclaimed incredulously.

"Who but she?" Naioh exclaimed triumphantly. "By night the Bintang Burung came, with none but the stars her guide, fearing neither the sharp-toothed tiger that stalks by night, nor the great bulls, nor the cobras that lurk on the trail. She came to my door and cried: 'Up with thee, Naioh, gather together thy people and seek the city of Ah Sing to see if our White Father be there. And if he be there bring word straight to me at this, thy hut, that I may summon together our people from the realms of the Sadongers to the *Tohen Batu*, summon them in their jackets of buffalo hide and helmets of cowry-shell, that we may save thy blood-brother from the fangs of the Yellow Spider.'"

"Where is she?" Peter Gross cried, starting up impulsively and looking about. His heart was warm with gratitude toward this woman who so oft had saved his life and residency, and who had again leaped to his aid at the first cry of alarm.

Naioh shrugged his shoulders.

"Who am I to know the swift flight of the Argus Pheasant?" he asked. "She may be in Bulungan, or she may be in Coti, or in her temple in the hills. Thou knowest the spirits bear her on their wings."

Peter Gross smiled, knowing the Dyak superstitions concerning their priestess's mysterious appearances and disappearances.

"When did she leave here?" he inquired.

"The sun has scarcely traveled its own width since she bade me farewell. She knows thou art safe. Ere thou parted the reeds where the water hyacinths grow she saw thee carrying thy woman." He spoke sternly and with evident feeling.

"Damnation!" Peter Gross exclaimed. He instantly

guessed the reason for Koyala's swift flight. She had assumed he was bringing a wife to Bulungan. He ran his fingers through his hair in perplexity.

"Are you sure she's gone?" he asked. "Listen, Naioh, this girl is no wife of mine. I have no claim on her and I never will have. She is the promised bride of another man. I helped her ashore when the pirates attacked the Zuyder Zee, and we are going to Bulungan together. The man she is going to marry was on the packet with us and is probably a prisoner at Ah Sing's camp. I want to rescue him for her with your help and Koyala's, if I can."

"Why did you not say this before, blood brother?" Naioh exclaimed feelingly. He leaped to his feet and whistled the peculiar call of the Argus pheasant.

While Peter Gross and Naioh were reaching an understanding on the river-bank, Grace secured a change of clothing in the form of a couple of bright-colored shawls which she adjusted about her body, and washed her own mud-colored garments. She was idling about the room, examining every article in it with feminine curiosity, when her glance fell upon a pair of mocassins lying on a rude couch. She pounced upon them with a low cry of pleasure, for the loss of her slipper was her chief worry, and she was wondering how she would be able to complete the journey to Bulungan. They were made of antelope hide, skillfully tanned, and soft as silk inside. It was not the excellency of the mocassins themselves that captivated her, however, so much as the trimmings. A row of magnificent amethysts, every stone of like size and weight with the others, and a perfect gem, ran from heel to toe on each. A finer collection of these jewels Grace had never seen.

"What beauties!" she exclaimed. "They're worth a fortune. Naioh must be immensely rich. I wonder if they are his daughter's?"

She examined them carefully, admiring every detail, the texture of the leather, soft and pliable as silk but wonderfully tough; the workmanship; and the jewels themselves. She noted the size.



"It would take *Cinderella* to wear these," she observed to herself. "The Dyaks must have wonderfully small feet."

She thrust out her own foot and scanned it speculatively. It was a small foot, very small; its daintiness and perfect lines had always been a source of secret pride to her. It looked large, however, for the moccasin.

"The leather will probably stretch some," she remarked to the vacant air. Glancing guiltily about, she seated herself on the couch and thrust a foot into one of the moccasins.

It was smaller than she had imagined. She tugged and pulled, but her heel would not settle down into the place made for it, for her foot was about a quarter of an inch too long. Chagrined, she persisted, exerting herself to the utmost and wholly oblivious to what might be happening about her.

A creaking in the bamboo floor aroused her. She looked up with a quick intake of breath. In the doorway stood a slender and diminutive woman clad in a costume of scarlet and skins. Her complexion was a dark olive and her hair raven-black. She was looking at Grace with coal-black eyes that glittered ominously, and she held herself tense and quivering as the hart that smells the hunter.

They gazed at each other in silence a moment. Grace, after the first gasp of surprise, appraised her visitor in a swift glance. The girl was evidently of mixed blood, the telltale duskiness of her cheeks as well as the sable blackness of her hair and eyes proclaimed it. What amazed Grace, however, was her startling beauty. Every feature was as regular as though carved by a Praxiteles and her form superb. Grace had not a moment's doubt as to her identity.

"I presume this is Koyala," she remarked pleasantly, aware that the priestess knew the English tongue.

The black eyes sparkled with anger. A very flame of hate darted from their lambent depths. The girl's

teeth—white as the heart of a coconut—clenched tightly between lips of scarlet red. The color in her cheeks darkened to maroon, her nostrils quivered, and her breath came and went in short gasps, and her whole body quivered in the passion that obsessed her.

In the broad sash of scarlet silk which she wore about her waist the jeweled hilt of a poniard gleamed. Her right hand suddenly darted to it and closed upon it. It was apparent that only a supreme effort of will kept her from leaping forward with bared blade and striking down the helpless girl before her.

“Remove that sandal!” she exclaimed. Each word was like the crack of a pistol. Her voice, deep, rich, and throaty, was stifled to a sibilant hiss in the passion that possessed her. She glided forward to within three paces of Grace. Her features were working spasmodically. It was apparent that at the slightest provocation she would lift the steel she clutched so desperately and thrust it home.

Grace shrank back appalled. She lacked the strength to resist or even to cry out. It was as though a cobra had suddenly lifted its venomous head and menaced her with its fangs. Cowering, she strove with nervous fingers to tear the offending sandal from her foot and placate this creature.

In doing so she stooped over and left her shoulder exposed. It was a terrible temptation to Koyala. Her eyes blazed with a hellish light, and she half drew the dagger from its sheath. But with a powerful effort of the will betrayed by a hissing expiration, she restrained herself.

Her eyes freed for the moment from the hypnotic influence of the priestess’s maniacal glare, Grace collected her thoughts. Her life hung by a thread, she perceived in swift intuition. She must placate and calm this woman; she must hold her in restraint until Peter Gross came. Certain death was the penalty for failure. Pulling herself together, she straightened with the moccasins in her hands. She smoothed and folded

them and tendered them to Koyala with a brave attempt to smile.

"They were so beautiful I could not resist the temptation of trying them on," she remarked in a voice that trembled in spite of her effort to control it.

Koyala's hand darted forward as though to snatch them away. Her fingers barely brushed them, however, when she drew her hand back as though they were poison. Drawing herself up to her full height, she announced haughtily and disdainfully:

"You have worn them. You may keep them."

The insult caused Grace's face to flame. Her eyes gleamed dangerously, but prudence cautioned a careful tongue.

"I cannot accept your gift," she replied simply.

Koyala flashed a fierce look of inquiry upon her. In a flash of feminine intuition Grace perceived the reason for that look. Koyala suspected that her offer had been spurned because she was of mongrel blood. She returned the glance tranquilly.

With a superb gesture of disdain, Koyala shrugged her shoulder and walked to the other side of the hut. Grace placed the moccasins on the couch, where she had found them. She had an uncomfortable feeling that thus far the heathen beauty had the best of the encounter. At the same time she was curious what the next move would be.

Koyala, wholly indifferent to the presence of a stranger, delved into a quaintly shaped reed receptacle and produced several articles from it which she placed in a row on a settee. There was a toothbrush of pure ivory, a comb studded with gems, a stylus for writing messages on bark, and a business-looking revolver. The revolver she strapped to her right limb above the knee, where it would be covered by the short knee-length leathern skirt she wore. These preparations complete, she closed the reed box and straightened. Her glance fell casually upon Grace, who had been watching her from the other side of the room.

"If you are Koyala," Grace observed, "do not leave without seeing Mynheer Gross. You will find him on the river-bank."

A flash of angry color darted in Koyala's face. With a furious glance at Grace she darted to the door and swung it open. At that moment Naioh's call of the Argus Pheasant came shrill on the silent air. Clenching her teeth, Koyala, without a moment's pause, leaped to the ground below, a drop of seven feet. While Grace stared in wonder, she disappeared into the canebrake.

It was Koyala's intention to escape without permitting Peter Gross to see her. Maddened by the thought that he had preferred another woman to her, and overwhelmed with virginal shame, she yearned to hide herself in the deepest depths of the jungle mazes where no eye could see her misery and no creature could gloat over her humiliation. But her very haste defeated her object. As she sped up the jungle trail, half-blinded by the smarting tears that came to her eyes, her foot fouled a sapling snare set by Naioh. She leaped aside just in time to dodge the noose as it shot upward when the sapling was released, but in doing so became entangled in a nest of creepers. As she struggled to release herself, Peter Gross and Naioh, whose acute ears had heard the swish of the sapling, came upon her.

Koyala's face paled and then crimsoned. The hot blood stained her cheeks. Eyes flashing defiance through the tears she met Peter Gross's inquiring gaze.

"You are in haste, *juffrouw*," he remarked quietly, extending his hand. "You must give me an opportunity to thank you."

She ignored the proffered hand. Her head tilted haughtily.

"I do not ask your thanks, Mynheer Gross," she replied with curtness.

"I not only want to thank you—I want to ask your further assistance, *juffrouw*," the resident announced. "I want you to help me rescue those who are prisoners in Ah Sing's camp. One of them is a young man who

is to wed the maid who swam ashore with me. I want to return her to him."

Koyala lifted startled eyes to meet the gravely questioning glance of Peter Gross. His face expressed absolute candor. She knew him too well to doubt his word. A curious glaze came over her eyes—she felt strangely weak. Shame and humiliation at having revealed her maiden soul were inextricably mingled with a deep, fierce, exulting joy that Peter Gross was not bound to the pink-cheeked girl she had found in Naioh's hut, the girl whom she hated so virulently for her very fairness of skin.

"Who is this woman you brought hither?" she demanded in the Dyak tongue.

"Her name is Grace Coston," Peter Gross replied frankly. "She is an American, and was a passenger on board the Zuyder Zee. When the pirates attacked the ship we sprang overboard after all was lost and swam to shore together. Her stepmother and the young man to whom she is betrothed remained on the packet and are probably prisoners."

Koyala did not speak. Her face was lowered and hidden from Peter Gross, whose inches were a handicap. Two great tears rolled from her eyes and stained her cheeks. She swept them away with a passionate gesture. Her whole frame trembled, and she clenched her teeth lest she give way utterly to a burst of weeping.

These things were unobserved by Peter Gross. Wise in most things, he was wholly ignorant of the emotional gales that sweep the souls of women at apparently trivial causes. Consequently, fearful that he had offended her, he asked:

"You will help me, won't you, *juffrouw*?"

Dashing the tears away she cried in a hoarse, muffled voice:

"Go to Bulungan at once. Do not waste a moment."

She whirled to face the Dyak chief. "Naioh," she said, "take your guests in your swiftest *tambangan* to the mouth of the little creek that empties a half-hour's

journey north of Bulungan *plaats*. At the third hour past sunset I will meet you at the foot of the great banyan tree that shades the kiosk of the Dattoo Maholo's *ganeca-idol*."

A flash of color in the cane and she was gone.

## CHAPTER X

### THE PASAR AT BULUNGAN

PASAR day at Bulungan. Riot of riches and color, of pomp and nakedness, of squalor and barbaric profusion, of ribaldry and lamentation, of smells and sweetness, of bargaining everywhere. A din unending, insidious, omnipresent. Pennants flying and sweating hordes in the narrow streets; the weak trampled underfoot and the strong fighting their way through the throng with fist and tooth and claw. He the best merchant who can create the loudest alarm. Men in their gay panoply, fighting, dicing, gaming, and participating in the sports; women bent double under great loads of copra and rattan, bags of rice and coffee, pots of *djeloetong*, and all the myriad products of an intensely fertile alluvial plain blessed by tropic sun and rain.

Proud is he to-day who owns a bullock and more than one wife. He can come to *pasar* in state. Before the day is over his year's produce and a wife or two may have changed ownership over the gaming table, but this morning, at least, he is able to look haughtily down upon his less fortunate neighbor who has only one *bini* (wife) and no bullock, and is thus perforce required to saddle a part of his produce on his own back.

Three stalward Bugis charge into the crowd, bellowing lustily, "Make way there, make way," they cry, "for the most noble, the most exalted, the thrice illustrious and holy Abi Ben Ali, wearer of the *hadji-tulband* by the grace of Allah, merchant of Surabaya." Abi Ben Ali is in Bulungan to buy copra and cinchona. His three pilgrimages to Mecca, he knows, will attract to him the faithful, eager to see so holy a man. Because

of them he will be able to buy at a ten percent discount from the market price, for every Moslem knows he will get credit at the gates of paradise for selling to a true believer and Mecca pilgrim rather than to an unbelieving pig-eating Hollander.

Abi Ben Ali appreciates the value of advertising, hence the three stalward Bugis with their rich robes—men chosen for robustness of voice as well as for their sinews.

In the great square at the center of the town, where the buying and selling takes place, the confusion and din reach their apex. Men from nearly every race and clime are there. Lean Arabians, grave, impassive, and expressionless as their own desert sands, stalk coldly by stately Parsees in flowing robes. Brusk, aggressive Bugis from Celebes lord it over the other East Indians. Bland Chinamen flit from grobak to grobak and godown to godown, scenting bargains—there are no shrewder traders.

The stolid, deliberate Dutchmen herd by themselves, weighing and checking with scrupulous exactitude. The thin, ascetic representative of a London house affects to be bored by the whole spectacle, but quietly picks up goods here and there which will bring a fat profit in England. A Yankee trader with the unceremoniousness of his kind plows through a horde of islanders to get a better glimpse of an attractive bunch of bird-of-paradise feathers.

The square is ridiculously small for such a mob. There must be at least thirty-thousand souls packed in the enclosure. The walls of the bazaars threaten to burst outward with the throngs that fill them. Dealers in sweetmeats and *toko-artikelen* are doing a brisk business. It is only ten o'clock by the Englishman's watch, but already you can see drunken natives crawling under huts to sleep off the effects of arrack and opium. The women munch black cakes of maize and rice flour smeared with molasses and admire each other's beads and earrings, occasionally stopping to gossip about the idiosyncrasies of their respective lords and masters.



Passamaquoddy, Maine, or Bulungan, a fair is a fair the world over.

During the first half of the morning the trading went briskly, but as the sun mounted the buying became more erratic. An undercurrent of unrest flowed through the crowd. Vague but alarming rumors sprang up from unknown sources and ran like wildfire along the lanes.

"Did you know that the *orang blanda* pigs have imposed a new tax?" the Malay copal producer whispered to his neighbor. "Aye, the thieves! They will strip us clean. Half of each man's crop must go to the state, I am told. Bulungan will not endure it, the raja is even now meeting with his *kjais*," *et cetera*, in the same vein. Another whispered significantly about strange proas swooping by night along the coast—the pirates were abroad again. Still another whispered of tribal meetings in the hills by moonlight, and of the empty skulls of departed chieftains proclaiming a holy war. A ratlike Dyak from the interior dropped a word about a revival of the *pantang naioh*—(head-hunting expeditions). So the rumors ran, creating panic among some, and hilarious but suppressed joy among others.

Each blast of the trumpet, as a raja of rank or a Malay datoo with his retinue of *kjais* and lesser dignitaries advanced with pomp and pageantry into the square caused shivers to run up and down apprehensive spines. The peacefully inclined looked up the hill toward Fort Wilhelmina and whispered anxiously to each other: "Where are the soldiers of the *orange blanda*? Why are there none in the market place?"

It was the custom for the administration to police the city during *pasar* day, but Captain Carver, following Koyala's warning, decided to keep his little force intact and await eventualities at the fort. Thus, though the Raja Wobanguli sent two deputations with politely worded invitations to the captain to come to *pasar*, he was each time met with an equally polite declination.

The market customarily continued until sunset with a short intermission during the heat of the day when every

one sought refuge under shelter and slept as he was best able. When toward noon, however, it became noticeable that the trading was slackening, the merchants began making hurried preparations for departure. The Chinese, ever alert to note signs of unrest, were the first to pack their wares and hie to their junks.

"No use looking for trouble," the Yankee trader observed to the Britisher, and rowed out to his schooner. The Hollanders and the Arabs next returned to their respective ships, leaving the native traders undisputed possessors of the mart.

Closeted in his long hut with the leading chieftains of his realm, Dyak and Malay, the Raja Wobanguli did not hear of the general exodus until it was well advanced. Tribesmen who had come to the market to convert their year's labor into colored cotton, salt, and gewgaws, broke the news to him by descending *en masse* upon the long house. Frightened by the clamor at his gates, the raja sent messengers in post-haste to the skippers of such ships as remained in the harbor begging them to return ashore with their goods. But the traders were wary. A hand as small as a cloud was sufficient warning to them. They knew the fickleness of the Dyak. So with but few exceptions they set their sails and fled the harbor.

While the palace guards were subduing the rioters, the raja closeted himself in his palace, the prey of the gloomiest reflections. His carefully laid plans had gone wholly awry. To seize all the ships in the harbor and their treasures, to capture Fort Wilhelmina while the soldiery was in the city, and to enroll the vast horde of Dyaks and Malays that came to the city for the market into an army to defy the Dutch, was the *coup* he had planned with Ah Sing. He had expected to strike immediately after the rice table hour, when the city was at rest and merchants and traders would be enjoying a siesta.

But fate had been against him. The traders had taken alarm. Captain Carver had remained in the fort, whose grim guns were turned on the town. The raja had a wholesome respect for artillery—once before, in the old

days, he had made an undignified scamper into the jungle to the accompaniment of whistling shells and shrapnel.

"What would Ah Sing say?" was the question he asked himself. He feared the Chinaman as he feared torture. He knew Ah Sing's ruthlessness, his savage wrath at those who miscarried his plans, and his cruel punishment. True, he was raja of all the Dyaks of Bulungan, but the Yellow Spider had the reputation of paying little attention to native titles when it came to rewarding his friends or punishing his foes. An uneasy feeling possessed him that there would be an unpleasant hour when Ah Sing and he settled accounts, and he reported the miscarriage of their joint plan.

This thought led him to see excuses for himself. First of all he blamed Ah Sing himself. Had not the pirate leader promised to send a swift proa with news of the success of the attack on the Zuyder Zee? Had he not implicitly agreed to speed the word of the capture of Peter Gross? And here *pasar* day was three-fourths gone, and still no word from the camp where the rovers hid.

The raja struck a Chinese gong sharply. A Dyak guard entered.

"Is there any sign of a proa with a yellow dragon flag off the harbor?" he inquired.

"There is none, most illustrious!" the Dyak reported.

"Do not fail to bring me word the moment such a proa is sighted," the raja commanded.

"Most illustrious, your wishes shall be obeyed."

The raja resumed his gloomy cogitations. He should have struck that morning, he realized. Ah Sing had specifically directed that he must not delay. But the raja had temporized. He had desired to be certain of the pirate chief's success before he committed himself. The policy he had adopted was to wait until the proa came. But meanwhile the traders had been frightened away and *pasar* day was passing with neither trading nor loot.

Should he act now, the raja asked himself. There was still time to seize what ships were left in the harbor and throw a cordon around the fort. That would be sufficient

to convince Ah Sing of his absolute loyalty. The departure of the merchants could be explained satisfactorily, but not failure to strike.

On the other hand, the Zuyder Zee might have resisted attack. Peter Gross might have escaped the snare set for him. Great as was Wobanguli's fear of the Chinaman, he had a greater fear of the *Orang Blanda Kapala* who dwelt on the hill above Bulungan. For Peter Gross, he knew, read the native heart as the Dyak reads a jungle trail, and his justice was impervious to cajolery or bribe.

Torn between these conflicting opinions, dreading consequences whatever he might do, the cowardly raja paced the floor of his long house. Half decided one moment to throw his lot openly with Ah Sing, and half decided the next to defy the pirate leaders and put his trust in the ultimate victory of the hated *orang blanda*, he did nothing. It was a situation where craft and cunning did not avail, and action was the only solution. But the raja lacked the courage to act, fearing a misstep.

The sun was beginning to glide down the steep gradient of the western sky when a pennant-decked proa sailed into the harbor. It was flying the yellow dragon flag. A member of the palace guard brought the news to Wobanguli. The raja's face lit with elation, the pennants could only mean one thing: Ah Sing had been successful. Then he turned gray with fear as he remembered his own faithlessness to his ally. Hastily marshaling his excuses, he directed in a quavering voice that the palace guards be turned out to escort him to the beach. They dashed down the narrow lane on the double-quick, bowling over every unfortunate in their path. Wobanguli, seated in a palanquin carried by six sweating bearers, berated them for their sluggishness.

As they approached the wharf a haughty Malay chieftain stepped off the deck of the gayly decked proa. Wobanguli hastened forward and they rubbed noses. The raja's anxiety was too great to permit him to indulge in the customary amenities, and he asked:

"All is well, blood brother?"

"All is well," the Malay announced.

"You have taken the ship and the *orang blanda*?"

"We have taken the ship that smokes and much booty," the Malay announced. "There were great riches aboard her; also many captives, whom we will hold for a goodly ransom. The order has gone forth that none of the *orang blanda* are to be killed, for there is much wealth hidden under their skins."

"Is the *Orang Blanda Kapala*, Peter Gross, among the captives?" the raja inquired anxiously.

"It is a great grief to our master, the Yellow Spider, that the *Orang Blanda Kapala* preferred eternal incarceration in a shark's belly to torture at the hands of Ah Sing," the Malay reported.

"You are sure he is dead?"

"Can even a pearl diver live in the surfs off Maghalien?"

Wobanguli groaned. "The devil himself would bear him up and bring him ashore to confound us," he observed quaveringly. Anxiety and indecision were writ on his furrowed brow, the craft that usually enabled him to dissemble his inward quakings failed him. The Malay looked at him first in wonder and then in disgust.

"Does your heart fail you, raja, lest *Sangjang* release the *kalalungan* (ghost) of the *orang blanda* from hell and it come to plague you?" he sneered.

Wobanguli pulled himself together with an effort. He was a ruler and could not afford to show fear. Drawing himself to his full height he exclaimed in deep majestic tones:

"It is a raja's privilege, Dattoo of Kotara, to consider the blood of his people. If Peter Gross be alive, then will much blood flow here. There are those who will follow him, and we will have a civil war."

"Would a Dyak fight for the *orang blanda* against his own kin?" the datoo asked scornfully.

"Aye, if Peter Gross be alive. For there is one voice in Bulungan that the people heed more than mine, and that is the voice of the Bintang Burung. She has a fondness for this man. If he be in peril she may read

us strange messages from the *hantu token* and Gunong Agong, the great fire mountain."

"I have a message concerning her from our master," the datoo replied.

"Should eagles soil their beaks in buzzards' nests?" Wobanguli inquired silkily. "Behold the gaping ears of these carrion around us." He nodded toward the bearers. "Surely you are my guest and will abide with me in my long house?"

Opening the door of his own palanquin he invited the Malay to enter.

An expression of gratified vanity replaced the mocking sneer on the datoo's face. His contempt for Wobanguli rapidly evaporated under the subtle flattery of the distinguished honor shown him of being permitted to ride in the royal palanquin with the raja. A Malay was by virtue of his birth better than any Dyak that ever breathed, he said; still, it was not every datoo who could sit at a raja's right hand in the streets of Bulungan. Wobanguli perceived his guest's elation, and a subtle smile flitted over his crafty features.

That night, as they sat at meat, the Dattoo of Kotara told with much gusto how Ah Sing's ruse had succeeded. The datoo had drunk deeply of arrack, stimulated thereto by the cunning raja, and his tongue was consequently loose. Wobanguli thus learned that Ah Sing was not wholly satisfied of his loyalty and perceived that decisive action alone would restore him in the Chinaman's good graces.

"Thou didst speak of a message from our master concerning the Bintang Burung," he remarked unctuously to his guest.

"The master commands that she be kept in the temple of the hills till all Bulungan is ours," the datoo related. "The guards shall be Malays, Atjeh and Paneh, and Kromo of Kendangan, all of whom are here with me."

"The Dyaks will not tolerate that harm come to her," Wobanguli remonstrated.

"She will be safe—Ah Sing covets her beauty too

highly to injure a hair of her head," the datoo sneered. Wobanguli's eyes flickered, for he had retained sufficient pride of race to resent such an insult to a priestess of his people.

"Why is this necessary?" he inquired suavely.

"Because that thrice-damned spawn of a crocodile, Peter Gross, may have been warned and fled ashore before we attacked his ship," the datoo declared heatedly.

Thus Wobanguli learned that his fears concerning the resident were not wholly unfounded.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE MALAY'S DEMAND

**A** DIM light burned in the bachelor quarters that Captain Carver maintained at Fort Wilhelmina. It served to illuminate mildly a room small but cozily furnished. There was a desk against the outside wall and against the opposite partition a built-in davenport served as a divan by day and a bunk by night. In the center was a massive dining-table of rosewood, product of some of Borneo's finest timber. Its waxen polish was well nigh perfect. It contributed an air of quiet elegance that seemed quite in harmony with its tenant.

The atmosphere was heavy and oppressive. This was due, no doubt, to the fact that the warm afternoon air was confined in the room by heavy teakwood shutters, tightly barred. Tiny rifts of breeze percolated occasionally through a partially open door, facing a corridor, but the circulation was barely sufficient to make the tiny cubicle habitable. Knowing the treachery of the Dyak and his penchant for secret night attacks with poisoned arrows, Captain Carver had ordered every shutter barred, and rigidly imposed upon himself the same regulations by which he governed his subordinates.

The crisp challenge of a sentry in the corridor broke the silence.

"Friend," was the response in the cheery tones of Paddy Rouse. "Damned if I know the countersign, though."

"Advance, friend, and damn the countersign," the sentry declared gravely, whereupon both chuckled. It was obvious that Paddy and the soldier were in a like



mood—men who have drilled and sweltered and moped in inaction under a Bornean sun for two years may be pardoned an unmilitary levity at the prospect of action.

Paddy raised his brows in surprise as he entered.

"I beg your pardon, captain," he apologized. "I did not know you were here."

Carver permitted himself the ghost of a smile.

"I rather assume you didn't," he replied.

"I was in a hurry and didn't stop to inquire the countersign," Paddy explained. "May I borrow your map of the Oolang district?"

"Certainly." The captain produced the map from his files. "Have you heard anything from down below?" he inquired.

"Not a thing. I'm afraid it's going to fizzle." There was deep dejection in his tones.

Captain Carver's lips twisted grimly.

"Mighty hot here," Paddy observed, squinting at the barred teakwood blinds as he rubbed the perspiration from his brow. "Wonder if we can't have a little air here?"

"It is contrary to regulations," Carver announced.

"What's the idea?"

"It might be hotter if a poisoned arrow dropped through," the captain observed dryly.

Paddy sobered. The captain's grim humor put a curb on his exuberant spirits.

"There's still no sign of the Zuyder Zee?" Carver inquired.

"Nothing in sight. That old hooker of the Borneesch Industrie Maatschappij is lying in the bight below us, with a British schooner from Singapore and a Chinese junk."

"H-m! What's their present disposition?"

"They're lying in the form of a 'U' with the junk forming the base and the schooner and hooker the arms. The junk is as close in to the rocks as she dare."

"Not a bad move, that," Carver commented. "The proas are not likely to take chances in the surf."

"I don't know whether these Chinamen will fight or not," Paddy remarked. "Sometimes those Chinks put up an awful scrap, and sometimes they go blue funk and scuttle like rats. If somebody mentions Ah Sing to them they'll probably jump overboard and take chances on the sharks."

"How about the others?"

"They'll fight. There are eight whites aboard the schooner and an even dozen Bugi boys. They're a tough-looking crowd. I invited them to come into the fort, as you suggested, but they wouldn't listen. There are fifteen Dutchmen and a bunch of Java coolies on the hooker. Of course the coolies are no good, but the Dutch will fight to the last ditch. They've got a three-pounder that ought to sink a proa or two if the Dyaks try an attack."

Captain Carver sat up with interest. "They have?" he exclaimed. "I wasn't informed of that. I wish we had it here."

"I invited them to join us, but they said they'd stick by their ship."

"The Chinese, too?"

"Yes. All of them."

"And they all refused?"

"Yes."

"Then they'll fight," Carver observed cheerfully.

"Take it from me, old Wobanguli will have his hands full tackling that crowd," Paddy declared with warm satisfaction.

"He'll attack the fort first," Carver declared. "He won't risk his proas under our guns."

"He's got as much chance taking this stockade as a hen has of flying to heaven," Paddy observed confidently.

"Unless he has superior artillery," Captain Carver modified.

"We're not in such bad shape when you consider our dugouts and our own little guns," the younger man asserted confidently. "We're in much better shape than two years ago. We ought to be able to hold out till the

Prins Lodewyk drops in; that jolly little gunboat sure saved our hides two years ago."

Captain Carver had too high a respect for the abilities of that master rogue, Ah Sing, to delude himself into believing that he would venture an attack without knowing precisely what opposition he would meet. But these doubts he kept strictly to himself. Meeting Paddy's cheerful and optimistic grin with a brave smile, he said:

"They'll know they've been in a fight, my lad; they'll know they've been in a fight."

"You're sure right they will," the youngster affirmed emphatically. "I only wish Peter Gross gets here on time."

Carver's face became drawn. "Aye," he murmured in a low voice, "we hope Peter Gross may get here on time."

There was a sharp challenge from the sentry outside. A moment's pause followed, then a buzz of conversation.

"What is it?" Captain Carver demanded, throwing open the door.

"Malay from Bulungan town wants to see you, sir," a sergeant announced.

"Show him in," Carver directed tersely.

The sergeant stepped forward with a gayly caparisoned warrior. His trappings showed him to be a man of rank. He advanced slowly and with dignity into Captain Carver's presence, his keen eyes alert.

Paddy rose and reached for the map of the Oolang district. Captain Carver nodded in the direction of a chair. "Sit down, Paddy," he requested. "I want you to listen to this interview."

As Captain Carver seated himself behind the rosewood table the Malay stalked haughtily by the sergeant and drew himself to his full height on the opposite side. He was a superbly built barbarian and the ugly defacements which the custom of the country decreed, rings through his ears and nostrils, did not destroy a certain savage nobility and handsomeness. He carried himself like a king, making no salaam, but addressing

Captain Carver as an equal. The captain's face was stern, but the Malay met it with a frown as severe as Carver's own.

"You have a message for me?" Captain Carver asked bruskiy.

"I am Njam, Dattoo of Teluan, lord of the marshes, toll-keeper of the highways, ruler over thirteen villages and forty dessoas, by the grace of Allah of the race of Muartabenegro who came to Borneo ere the plains were made," the Malay announced proudly.

"I don't give a damn about your name and ancestry," Carver replied. "What have you to say to me?"

Paddy grinned. He perceived the captain's purpose to rouse the Malay's temper, if possible, and lead him to make incautious revelations. Carver's speech was justified, for the Malay's whole bearing and refusal to salaam was a studied insult.

The Dattoo Njam flushed under his swarthy tan. He had not expected to have his incivilities matched.

"I come from the council of the rulers of Bulungan," he rejoined harshly. "We demand that our *Orang Blanda Kapala*, Mynheer Peter Gross, meet with us."

"Twice this day have I sent word to your raja, Njam, that Mynheer Peter Gross is not here," Carver replied sternly. "For the third and last time I tell you, he is not here. You may tell your raja that if he sends another message I will assume that he doubts my word, and act accordingly."

The Malay's lips curved scornfully.

"The council bids me say," he rejoined: "'If our *Orang Blanda Kapala* be not here to meet with us, let his servant, the Mynheer Kapitein, come.'"

"You may tell your council this," the captain replied without a moment's hesitation: "I am a soldier; my place is here. If the council wishes to meet with me, it can come here."

A malignant light gleamed in the Malay's eyes.

"The night is dark and the way is long," he sneered. "Perhaps Mynheer Kapitein loves not the darkness?"

The big blue veins in Captain Carver's temples re-

vealed how the taunt infuriated him and how nearly he came to losing his self-control, but he gave no other sign of his passion. His lips parted in a smile that was too fixed to be wholly pleasant, and his keen, gray eyes transfixed the Malay's black ones as he rose and said in a voice of icy sweetness:

"Your herald's badge protects you, datoo. It may be my pleasure to meet you again soon under different circumstances."

Turning to the sergeant he snarled:

"Get rid of this carrion."

The Malay did not know English. But the captain's tone and the sergeant's grin were sufficient to indicate to him the general purport of the words. He turned like a flash, eluded the sergeant's grasp, and darted out. As he passed through the door he cast back at Carver a glance of fiendish malignancy. Then the blackness of night swallowed him.

"This means war," Paddy observed when they were alone again.

"If it wasn't for the innocents that would lose their lives I'd be tempted to take a hundred men down below and clean out that nest of vermin," Captain Carver returned viciously, pacing the room. "By God, I hope Peter Gross slips through their fingers."

Hours passed and Captain Carver retained his lonely vigil. The search-light was stabbing great holes in the darkness and every fifteen minutes a report was brought back to headquarters: "All quiet." Shortly after midnight he strolled toward the main gate. As he approached, he heard a slight disturbance and the sounds of conversation. He hastened forward, never doubting but what another emissary had come, this time to declare war.

"What is it?" he asked the corporal in charge.

The corporal stuttered inarticulately and paused: "Beg pardon, sir," he replied in a voice of amazement, "but a young lady, an English lady, wants to come in and doesn't know the countersign."

The captain restrained an incredulous reply and

stepped forward to investigate. By a lantern's yellow light he saw a pale and much bedraggled young woman who smiled bravely in spite of her evident exhaustion and asked:

"Is this Captain Carver?"

"It is," he articulated.

"I am Grace Coston, captain. I was a fellow-passenger with Mr. Gross on the Zuyder Zee and he directed me to come here to you."

It is to the credit of the American army, which gave him his training, as well as to the Holland army, in which he served, that the captain did not permit a trace of his astonishment to appear. Bowing politely, he murmured:

"Won't you come with me to headquarters, Miss Coston?"

Turning to an orderly he said:

"Convey my compliments to Lieutenant and Mrs. Van Voort and request them to come to my office immediately. Ah! and have Ali prepare us chocolate."

## CHAPTER XII

### PETER GROSS COMES TO BULUNGAN

THE surf runs quite strongly at the mouth of the little creek a half-hour's journey to the north of Bulungan where Koyala had bidden Naioh to land Grace Coston and Peter Gross. Only a skillful *jurumuddi* can negotiate the passage when the sea is running, and none attempts it after nightfall. Thus Naioh and Peter Gross, both of whom were masters of the clumsy and heavy Bornean *tambangan*, had no fear of meeting other craft when they turned the nose of Naioh's boat shoreward.

Passing the barrier of splinty, foam-crested shale was a delicate operation, and taxed the utmost strength of both men. But darkness concealed the perils of surf and rock as well as the almost superhuman strength and cleverness put forth by Naioh and Peter Gross. All that Grace knew of straining eyes searching the shore-line for the glint of a star on open water, and of the desperate struggle with tide and current, was a few moments of suspense as they shot through the giant breakers. She did not perceive that Peter Gross had purposely placed her next to him that he might seize her and shield her body from the rocks with his own in the event the frail craft was hurled against a blade of shale.

Once the surf barrier was passed they glided swiftly and silently along the creek toward the agreed meeting-place, the kiosk which the Datoo Maholo had built for his *ganeca* idol in the shade of a great banyan.

As their light craft grounded on the sands a vague

form detached itself from the somber forest gloom. Naioh leaped nimbly out and there was a moment's whispered colloquy between him and the figure on the beach. He then drew the tambangan high on the shore. Not a word was spoken. Grace restrained her curiosity, for Peter Gross had emphatically warned her of the necessity for silence. She tried to pierce the veil of blackness, but her eyes, unaccustomed to the nocturnal gloom of the jungle, could decipher nothing.

"We are alone, Mynheer Gross. You may speak without fear," the stranger said. It was a woman's voice.

"Koyala!" Grace exclaimed under her breath. She stared at her in bewilderment. Knowing the leagues that lay between them and Naioh's hut she could not conceive how the priestess, following the jungle trails, could have preceded them to this place. A sense of awe came upon her in this silent nocturnal forest where the dew dripped like rain from the trees and every bush and clump was a menace. It was not hard to believe this woman invested with the mysterious powers with which she was credited by her people.

"You made a swift journey, *juffrouw*," Peter Gross observed. Grace noted the warm friendliness of his tone.

"To those who know the lanes the journey is not long," Koyala replied in a strangely subdued voice. With a swift flash of pride she added: "The jungle knows its child and is kind to her."

"Aye, she has been kind to you, Koyala," Peter Gross replied. Under his breath he added sadly: "Kinder than man."

Naioh asked his priestess a question in the Dyak tongue.

"They are all at Bulungan," Koyala answered. A note of scorn came into her voice. "Those who are not drunk with arrack and gin are palavering at a *bitchara* with the raja." She turned toward Peter Gross: "They want you there, *mynheer*."



The resident deliberated a moment. Then he asked: "Should I go, *juffrouw*?"

Koyala hesitated. "Jackals flee when the lion roars," she observed cryptically.

"Spoken as I thought you would, my brave girl," the resident responded warmly. "I shall go."

Peter Gross's question had surprised Grace, and Koyala's cryptic reply amazed her still more. It was hard to believe that a governor of a province should place such confidence in and be guided by a child of the forest. To Grace it savored of an undue familiarity that was quite embarrassing, particularly since she owed her own rescue to him. She thought of what Mrs. Der-ringer had said concerning these two, but instantly dismissed the thought—his grieved face the night previous when the light flared was still too vivid in her mind. Yet she could not help wondering how far Koyala had extended her influence over Peter Gross.

There was no opportunity for further conversation, for at this moment a native led forward a lumbering ox-cart, which Koyala had provided. They clambered into the clumsy vehicle. Peter Gross and the priestess conversed together in guarded tones, and largely in the Dyak language. The taciturn Naioh drove. Grace was largely left to her own devices. She felt quite *de trop*. At the same time she was forced to admit to herself that Peter Gross's attitude toward Koyala was far from loverlike; in fact, he was acting more like an attorney cross-questioning a witness than like a gallant swain. The resident was busy informing himself on developments at his residency-seat during pasar day.

From Peter Gross and Koyala, Grace's thoughts reverted to her own kin and fiancé. What had been their fate? She had asked that question of herself a thousand times since she had seated herself in the bottom of Naioh's tambangan and had been given opportunity for reflection. What treatment were they receiving? Would they indeed be held for ransom as Peter Gross insisted, or did a worse fate await them?

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She thought of Vincent, high-spirited, proud and willful. He was the type that shunned labor and discomfort like a pestilence, until the hour of peril came and then suffered incredible hardship and death itself, if need be, with never a murmur. She knew his rashness, his hot-bloodedness; she knew how his proud nature flared under indignities. Yet he would hold himself in restraint for Violet's sake if she needed him.

"God keep him patient," she prayed.

And "Vi," tender, fragile, luxury-loving Vi, what of her? Would she be able to endure the hardships of a Malay pirate prison-camp? A thought too horrible for utterance came to her, a nightmare presentiment that caused her heart to stop beating. A groan was wrung from her lips.

"You're ill, Miss Coston?" Peter Gross cried, bending over her in quick solicitude.

"I was thinking of those on board the Zuyder Zee," she replied.

Peter Gross turned swiftly and asked Koyala a question in the Dyak tongue. She replied briefly in the same language.

"Your friends are safe," he announced joyfully to Grace. "They are enumerated among those taken captive. A proa brought the news to Bulungan this afternoon."

A flood of relief poured over Grace.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed in a voice choking with happiness. She closed her eyes to keep the tears from starting. Koyala's assurance that Vincent and Violet were safe was almost more than she could bear after the dread and uncertainty she had suffered that day and the physical hardships she had undergone.

Naioh pulled up the oxen and the creaking *grobak* stopped. In the distance the lights of Bulungan twinkled.

"We must part here," Koyala announced. "Naioh will take the *jonge juffrouw* to the fort."

As Peter Gross appeared to hesitate she said in a

cold, passionless voice: "If you expect to attend the council, we must make haste, *mynheer*."

Yielding with evident reluctance, Peter Gross said regretfully to Grace: "I am sorry, Miss Coston, but I won't be able to accompany you to the fort. It is necessary for me to go to the village below. Naioh will go with you. You can trust him. It would be best, probably, for you to lie in the bottom of the *grobak* and cover yourself with straw. In the event Naioh is challenged he can represent himself as a *dessa* man returning from the *pasar*. When you reach the fort call for Captain Carver and tell him what has transpired."

Without waiting for her reply he turned to the Dyak chief and repeated his instructions.

It was an awkward and embarrassing moment for Grace. She had a very positive suspicion that Koyala was gloating over her ability to detach Peter Gross from their company. She disliked seeing the resident so greatly under the influence of this heathen beauty. She thought his conduct most ungallant. At the same time she looked forward to a trip through the dark jungle with Naioh as her sole companion with considerable trepidation. She recollected keenly the hostile glare that Naioh had cast upon her when they first met and was conscious of his continued animosity, although she did not know the cause.

"Naioh will bring you safely to the fort," Peter Gross announced cheerfully. "You're not afraid, are you, Miss Coston?"

"Not at all," she responded. Somehow her voice was not as convincing as the words she spoke.

Peter Gross's brow knitted. "I'm sorry," he declared penitently. "I wish there were time to take you to the fort." He paused. In that pause the good angel that protects simple men whose hearts are right, inspired him. "I am going to Bulungan to meet the native rulers of the residency," he explained. "I may persuade them to keep peace with us. There is danger; I therefore cannot take

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you. If I wait an hour it may be too late. Therefore I must go now. You understand, do you not?"

The frank appeal won Grace. She clasped his hand in impulsive comradeship.

"Go, and God be with you," she exclaimed. "Don't think of me. I know I'll be safe with Naioh."

With a smile on her lips, but apprehension in her heart, she entered the *grobak* again, Peter Gross assisting her. Her hand lingered a moment in his. She wondered if he felt the swift throbbing of her pulse. Then in a tone of perfect and deceiving cheerfulness she announced to the Dyak chief:

"I am ready."

Peter Gross watched the departure of the creaking *grobak* until it was swallowed by the gloom. Standing on the edge of the road, Koyala observed him with glittering eyes. What her thoughts were none ever knew. Certain they were not pleasant, for the Dyak blood mantled her cheeks in a scarlet tide. But the resident did not even notice her. As the last dim vestige of the swaying vehicle disappeared he breathed an anxious sigh.

"If *mynheer* is ready, we will go," Koyala remarked frigidly.

He heard the words, but his mind was too engrossed with the other woman to grasp the significance of her tones. Turning obediently he started toward the distant lights of Bulungan, Koyala at his side. He said nothing, and she left him to his thoughts. Her own were too bitter for utterance.

On the sharp turn of the road, where it angles as it reaches the river, she forgot the seal of caution on her lips. In the language of her priestly grandfather, Chawatangi, she hissed sibilantly:

"She made him carry her. Fondle a man, let him feel your softness, your smooth skin, your warm body, that is the white woman's way. They are all jades! Curse, curse them, Djath blast them—"

"What is it?" Peter Gross asked.

"Nothing," Koyala replied hurriedly in a stifled voice. "We must hurry or we will be too late."

About the same time a defiant little head rose out of the rice-straw in the bottom of a creaking *grobak* winding lumberingly up the hill toward Fort Wilhelmina and a voice pronounced quite clearly and decisively:

"You can do as you think fit, Mr. Mynheer Peter Gross."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE RAJA SEES A GHOST

**T**HROUGH the marshes, the rank, fetid marshes, smelling to heaven of decayed vegetation and dung, swilled and soured by pools and stagnant water coated with a heavy green scum, Koyala led Peter Gross into Bulungan.

There was no other way by which they could enter the city. Peter Gross's giant figure was too well known in the streets of his residency capital to enable him to escape detection along any of the customary thoroughfares. Premature discovery, he knew, would be fatal to the bold plan he had conceived for overawing the raja and his assemblage of native chiefs, a plan wholly based on catching the natives by surprise. Therefore Koyala and he were perforce required to take the marsh route, a route seldom followed by the Dyaks by day, and never at night.

Not that he had any great faith that his plan would succeed. He knew the native mind too well to expect that the savage Dyaks and their allies, the fierce Malays, chafing under the restraint of the past two years, would be readily turned aside from their former trade of freebooting. But his unexpected presence and a bold front might overawe the rabid crew and achieve the impossible, he thought. It was worth the risk, he decided.

His principal hope was the pusillanimous, politic, time-serving Wobanguli. If that astute ruler could be frightened into declaring for the crown there was a chance that the lesser chieftains would follow his example. Peter Gross knew that Wobanguli generally esteemed the nearer

evil the greater, and would be apt to fear a Peter Gross present in the flesh more than he would an Ah Sing distant some score miles from the scene of action. There was always a chance with such men, the resident concluded, thanking Heaven that the raja was no better endowed with backbone.

It was near midnight, and according to all the laws of the tropics the native population should have been immersed in deep slumber. The ravages of a zenith sun leave little vitality for moonlight excess. But on the contrary the streets were aglow with bobbing Chinese lanterns, flaring flambeaux, and native lamps carried on poles, vessels of clay holding a quantity of dammar. There were sounds of singing and ribaldry. The hoarse-throated shouting of men mingled with the gay, hysterical laughter of women and girls—laughter that carried a note of fear at times, Peter Gross observed grimly. Occasionally, too, women's shrieks rent the air, indicating that arrack and opium had made some of the visiting Malays forgetful of the extreme punctiliousness toward women demanded by their Dyak hosts. Whenever the din subsided somewhat the shrill, lugubrious notes of *kaludi*-players and the haunting pipings of snake-charmers alert to pick up stray coins, swept across the marshes. But the dominating note of the vast orchestral chorus of seething Dyak life was the shrill yapping of the army of gaunt, half-starved, scavenger, pariah dogs, the jackal-like creatures that infest every native village between Singapore and Celebes.

In startling contrast were the marshes, empty and devoid of all human life. Peter Gross had all a man's strength and a courage tried in many places when Death stalked gloomily by his side, but fear came to him that night. Horrible by day with its pitfalls, and hidden quicksands, and bottomless pools, infested by poisonous snakes and myriad stinging insects, and its intolerable stenches, the swamp was thrice horrible by night when darkness magnified its loathsomeness and multiplied its perils.

The original suggestion that they surprise Wobanguli

and enter Bulungan by the swamp route had come from Koyala. As they neared the city she said:

"Have you thought of how we shall enter the city, *mynheer*? It will not be safe for you to pass through the streets. Nor can we go by river or canal, for there are many *tambangans* and *proas* afloat, and we would surely be discovered."

"What have you in mind, *juffrouw*?" Peter Gross asked, confident that she had a plan.

Koyala outlined her proposal in a few words. Peter Gross considered it a few moments and nodded his head approvingly.

"Excellent!" he murmured. "Excellent! How can we reach the *balais* without being seen?"

"We must pass through the swamps," she announced.

Peter Gross hesitated. He knew the dangers of the morass; in fact, he had once led a little expedition into them in search of silks and calicoes stolen from a trading-coaster. But that was by day.

"The path is very uncertain," he remarked doubtfully. "If we make a single misstep no one would ever know what had become of us. And we couldn't carry lights, of course."

"I will lead," Koyala replied simply.

"No, by the holy poker, you won't," Peter Gross replied indignantly. "Do you think I'll let you take such a risk? If this is the only way to get into Bulungan, I'll go alone."

The hard, tragic lines in Koyala's face, lines she had worn since their parting with Grace Coston a half-hour previously, softened a trifle.

"You forget, *mynheer*, that the eyes of the Bintang Burung see in the darkness as well as in the light," she stated in a dry, expressionless tone. "If you should attempt to go alone, you would either fall into a pit and be drowned or be eaten by a crocodile. I could guide you safely through if I were blindfolded."

"I believe you could," was his secret acknowledgment, as he considered her proposal with furrowed brow. Knowing her wonderful familiarity with the nocturnal



jungle he felt constrained to accept her offer, distasteful as the acceptance of so dangerous a service from a woman was to him.

"I am in your hands, *juffrouw*," he declared resignedly.

Koyala gave no utterance to indicate that she divined his thoughts and appreciated his chivalry. But there was a light of happiness in her face, shrouded from Peter Gross by the gloom, as she sprang down from the stile into the swamp as lightly and gracefully as the bird for which she was named.

There was no path, at least none that Peter Gross could see. Holding his hand in hers, with a whispered word of warning now and then, Koyala zigzagged from clump to clump and hummock to hummock with the sure certainty of a winged thing. Sometimes they came to pools too wide to leap across and too extensive to circle. But these obstacles did not halt her. She invariably spanned them on a fallen log or by creating an aerial bridge of overhanging branches. Peter Gross experienced an eery sensation as he crossed on these bridges, his feet dangling a mere few inches above miry pools of inky blackness whose surface might part at any moment to disclose the gaping jaws of a man-eating crocodile. But he grimly followed wherever she led without a word of expostulation or complaint.

Koyala's slim, cool hand in his was wonderfully reassuring. It set his nerves tingling and the blood speeding through his veins. He wondered vaguely at these strange and inexplicable sensations. "Steady, Peter Gross," he cautioned himself, "you're getting as paniky as a buck Dyak throwing dice."

As they ventured farther into the city the marshes narrowed and the bedlam increased. There were also more canals and drains to be crossed and greater circumspection had to be employed to avoid the canoes lying alongside the banks. Rounding a cluster of screw-pine they unexpectedly ran into one. Both perceived it at the same moment and Peter Gross inadvertently uttered a low cry of warning. A drunken boatman suddenly rose in the stern of the vessel and challenged them.

But the word had scarcely left Peter Gross's lips when Koyala pulled him down into the tall grasses to avoid their being silhouetted against the horizon. The boatman peered about suspiciously, lurched, and recovered his balance with an effort. Mumbling something in the Dyak tongue he seated himself unsteadily in the bottom of the wabby canoe and paid no more attention to what was going on around him. Koyala, holding Peter Gross's hand tightly, guided him silently out of sight and hearing of the boatman.

"Thank Heaven the man was drunk," Peter Gross exclaimed subduedly in relief.

Koyala gave vent to a low gurgle of musical laughter.

"What did he say?" Peter Gross asked suspiciously.

"He said it was a pig, *mynheer*. He mistook your voice for a pig's grunting." She laughed again.

Peter Gross made no response. Koyala sobered quickly, wondering why he did not appreciate the joke. Although preternaturally keen in divining the thoughts of others, she could not have by the wildest flight of imagination guessed what was coursing through his brain.

He pondered sadly on the fact that a woman such as she, graced with a form and figure that a court beauty might have envied, and educated in a mission school, should possess grosser elements in her mental composition that every now and then asserted themselves in such vulgarities as her inane laughter at the Dyak's mistake. It was her Dyak blood, he told himself regretfully, a heritage which no amount of breeding could eradicate. Koyala could never be, either spiritually or corporally, what a woman of unmixed Caucasian origin should be.

Engrossed in this mystery of the ages he tramped by Koyala's side pensive and voiceless until she guided him quite unexpectedly to the foot of a little lane that debouched into the swamp not far from the rear of the *balais* where the Dyaks and Malays were meeting.

The lane was silent except for the skulking dogs doing their nightly scavenging. Koyala darted ahead, lithe

and stealthy as a panther. There was something characteristically feline in her movements as she glided from cover to cover, her ears alert, and her eyes exploring the denser shadows with long, questioning glances. As he watched her the odd notion occurred to Peter Gross that possibly the jungle creatures left her undisturbed when she roamed their domains after nightfall because they recognized her in some subtle way as one of themselves in spirit, if not in form.

More awkward and less accustomed to the gloom and the many obstructions along the narrow lane, Peter Gross was required to proceed with the utmost caution. He was emerging from the shadow of a house when a sniffing, slinking, mangy cur slunk between his legs and nearly tripped him. The cur darted away, yelping. A native inside the dwelling uttered a startled exclamation and threw open a door, thus casting a flood of light upon the alleyway. Quick as a forked thunderbolt, however, Koyala grasped Peter Gross's arm and pulled him under the house. They cowered behind the stall where the Dyak kept a goat while the master of the house peered curiously and suspiciously up and down the lane and exchanged comments with his equally curious neighbors whose doors had also been hastily thrown open that those within might see what untoward event had occurred to disturb the tranquillity of the neighborhood. It was fully fifteen minutes ere the talking ceased and quiet settled upon the lane. Berating himself for being a clumsy fool Peter Gross waited with Koyala until all was quiet and then followed her poste-haste toward the assembly hall.

This was the final mishap. A few minutes later Koyala stopped behind a stockade composed of posts of ironwood fronted with an interlacing of thorns which in times of war were dipped with the same translucent, toxic gum with which the Bornean anoints the deadly barbs he discharges from his blowpipe. A confused clamor of many voices came from within. Koyala skirted the stockade warily, avoiding the glimmering patches of light, until she came to a small postern or

gate. This was the rear entrance to Wobanguli's kampong. As luck would have it, no one was on guard. The priestess glided inside and a moment later summoned Peter Gross with a low-voiced hiss.

The *balais* stood in the center, a huge circular hut with various galleries radiating from it like the spokes of a wheel from the hub. Most of the kampong was brilliantly alight, but two of the galleries shut off the glare from that portion of the enclosure where the horses were picketed. As they advanced warily through this, one of the horses reared, but Peter Gross, who possessed a rare talent of inspiring confidence among dumb animals, quieted it with a whispered word and a touch of his hand on its coat. A Dyak guard who was lying in a drunken slumber near by did not even awake.

A huge rectangle on piles loomed before them. It was the rear of the assembly hall. Koyala placed her ear against the wall and listened. After a moment's tense silence she whipped a dagger out of her girdle and cautiously inserted the blade between two sticks of bamboo.

"You are stronger than I am," she whispered to Peter Gross in a voice that was so low as to be scarcely audible. "Cut a hole here large enough for us to pass through. Be careful, the slightest noise will ruin everything."

Working swiftly and silently, with infinite care, Peter Gross cut an aperture of the required size while Koyala stood with one ear flattened against the wall, her eyes meantime searching the kampong. As the square fell into his hand Koyala whispered fiercely into his ear.

"Your hand, quickly!" Her sandaled foot brushed his wrist, and as he steadied she lifted herself lightly into the opening. The next instant her hand extended from the darkness within to catch his. "Hurry!" she whispered.

Peter Gross had obeyed orders too long to debate or question in an emergency. He promptly raised himself and catapulted within, falling lightly as a cat on all fours. At the same instant Koyala shut out the light

coming through the aperture by fitting the square into its place.

"Sh!" she hissed. Peter Gross lay quite still. Beyond the wall he heard the stealthy footfalls of naked feet. Two Dyaks stopped alongside the building.

"I swear by Djath that I saw the flash of a *pisau* (knife)," one of them said. His language betrayed him as a hill Dyak. "The gleam of a star fell on it, and lo, when I looked again, there were shadows here like the legs of men."

"You have drunk too deeply of the raja's cheap palm wine," the other pooh-poohed. "Who would break into an empty harem when the long houses are open to all?"

"The shape of one was that of a woman," the first Dyak persisted.

"Now I know that you are either drunk or are possessed by an evil *Budjang Brani* spirit," the other declared, drawing away. "Would a woman enter *balais* while the council sits and risk the torture?"

Silenced by this reasoning, but apparently unconvinced, the first Dyak ran his hands over the wall. Fortunately, he did not find the spot where a section had been cut away. As they left, still quarreling, Koyala fastened the section in place with sticks of bamboo.

The confused din they had heard outside the kampong now became intelligible as the voices of men raised in heated argument. As Koyala finished binding the square in place a sudden stillness came upon the hall beyond. Then they heard the voice of a man declaiming, although the words were unintelligible, and a sudden outburst of angry exclamation.

Profound as had been the darkness of the marshes, it was exceeded by the abysmal blackness of the interior of the hut. Peter Gross could not see an inch ahead of him. But when Koyala grasped his hand she guided him between the low couches and the various primitive articles of furniture with a certitude that was amazing.

They stepped down from the harem and passed through a narrow gallery, partitioned into three sections

with heavy curtains. Koyala peered around the edge of the curtain each time before pulling it aside. At the end of the gallery they came to a low wicket. Koyala pulled Peter Gross down until his ear was the level of her lips and whispered:

"Put your ear against the wall. When I say the word, pass through and speak what Djath and the Christian God inspire."

A Malay was speaking. Peter Gross caught the harsh inflection at once, the Dyaks having more dulcet voices.

"To the *Orang Blanda Kapala*, I said," the speaker announced, "'Njam I am, Njam, Dattoo of Telaum, lord of the marshes, toll-keeper of the highways, prince over thirteen villages and forty dessas, by the grace of Allah, of the race of Muartabenego, friend of the children of Borneo, their ally in good or ill.'"

"I know thee', he answered me, 'thou Moslem pig, thou bastard spawn. Thy father was a renegade Sumatran who drove his brother's spirit to hell by slaughtering the crocodile wherein Djath gave it habitation; thy mother was a babe-eating Papuan. Thou wert cast by the sea on this filthy shore where none but scum make their habitation!'"

A yell of indignation interrupted him.

"Need I say more?" he appealed.

The crafty, low-toned, oily suave voice of the Raja Wobunguli replied: "Speak on, brother."

"You ask me that the resident or I, his *kapitein*, come to your *bitchara*,' he said to me," Njam continued. "'I tell you that henceforth there will be no more *bitcharas*. Your council is dissolved by decree. Slaves have no council. I will teach you Moslems to eat swine like Christians.'"

A fierce yell of execration shook the building.

"I will teach your Dyaks—"

A still wilder yell threatened to lift the roof off the structure.

"Your women will be mine to buy and sell. Your priestesses shall be thrown to the tigers, you shall feel the weight of a Christian foot upon your necks.'"

Pandemonium broke loose.

The vast structure rocked under the terrific din. Savages, plied with arrack and distilled spirits, skillfully herded and fed with violent opinion since their convocation, their passions of greed and lust roused by the tale of the sinking of the Zuyder Zee, and the captives and rich booty that had fallen to Ah Sing, harangued by tried orators, and now stirred to their deepest depths by a tale of insult and contumely grosser than any which Christian conqueror had yet dared heap upon the original owners of the soil, lost all sense of discernment and proportion.

They were in a mood to believe anything of their white rulers, however outrageous it might be. They had worked themselves into so bestial a fury that there was not a man there who did not see red. Murder, rapine, and extermination of the hated whites was the one thought that animated them. This was precisely the situation which the crafty Wobanguli had schemed to bring about.

When the Dattoo Njam began his report of Captain Carver's alleged remarks, Peter Gross listened in thunderstruck amazement. His surprise quickly gave place to indignation and a white-hot wrath as he perceived the trick that was being played upon the council.

"The damned liar!" he hissed between set teeth as the first yell interrupted the dattoo. But he stood stock-still, eager to hear the Malay to the end to fathom the full extreme of his perfidy.

"I will teach you Moslems to eat swine!" made him tremble with suppressed fury, and caused him to grip the handle of the door violently. But before he could wrench it open Koyala's slim fingers, stout as steel cords, fastened themselves around his wrist and restrained him.

"Wait, *mynheer*," she whispered warningly.

When Njam concluded his harangue, Peter Gross could not longer contain himself. "Let me go, Koyala," he whispered hoarsely. "Let me teach that lying dog something if it be my last act."

"Not yet, wait just a moment," she pleaded, refusing to release him.

Wobanguli eventually obtained silence. It was not his intention to permit the pent-up emotions of this mob of chieftains to express themselves in mere clamor. When a measure of order had been restored he asked unctuously:

"What was the *Orang Blanda Kapala's* answer to the request of the council?"

"I asked him: 'Send us our resident to *bitchara* with us—that he may talk peace and the welfare of our peoples,'" Njam reported. "'And if he be not here,' I asked, 'come thyself.' In answer to this he said:

"'Your resident is not here. Since he is not here I will answer for him. Henceforth we speak to the filthy swine of Bulungan through the mouths of our rifles and cannon. Go to your council and bid it to dissolve and let each man fly to his *dessa* like a *kaguan* to his hole lest my wrath come upon him.'"

A murmur filled the hall, but was instantly stilled.

"He is not here?" Wobanguli asked in oily tones.

"He is not here," Njam reported dutifully.

Koyala's hand let go Peter Gross's wrist. "Go!" she whispered fiercely. "Say what Djath and thy God inspire thee, and then spring back to this door with the swiftness of a tiger. I will wait for thee here."

Like a hungry lion springing into the arena in the days of the Neromian massacres, Peter Gross swung the door aside and leaped into the hall. He was not seen at first, for the great room was thronged with a mass as swaying, gesticulating men. Dyaks and Malays were lifting spears, kris, and padangs heavenward, shouting on their respective deities to avenge this insult. Their hoarse-throated cries created a din indescribable, and their stamping feet made the sturdily built structure shake as though smitten by a typhoon's blast. But above the shrieking and the shouting came a roar that was like the challenge of a bull:

"I am here, Njam!"

Through the hall, tossing Dyak and Malay aside like



so many bundles of rattan, strode the giant, Peter Gross. Giant is the term by which he must be described, for his flaming wrath seemed to add inches to his stature and gave him a strength more than human. In his wake he left men staring round-eyed and palsied at the thunderbolt that had passed among them. They thought him a spirit from Gunong Lumut, the Mount of Moss, where the dead spend the first few years of their after-existence. Small wonder, for had they not been assured that he had gone down into the depths of the sea and become the food of a shark?

"I am here, Njam!" he bellowed again as he was midway down the hall and the din began to still. His voice rang about the tumult like a lion's roar. The hall was instantly stilled. Men turned their eyes toward this apparition from the underworld and from him to the stage.

"I am here, Njam," he said a third time, and vaulted upon the platform where the Raja Wobanguli, white as a man of his color could be, and dry-lipped, sat on his royal seat next to Dato Njam, the herald. The datoo seemed to be shrinking into himself, his hands grasped the heavy arm-rests of his chair convulsively, and his vertebræ bent like a bow.

A stillness profound, absolute, reigned. The waving spears and krises were brought down. The assemblage stood as if petrified. Dyak and Malay, datoo and kjai stared at the stage with popping eyes like men who hear suddenly the brushing of the wings of the Angel of Death! Peter Gross, towering above them all, his arms folded over his breast, glared back. They shrank before his eyes, those eyes blazing with outraged justice, like guilty wretches visioning the headsman's ax. And still the dreadful silence continued till it seemed the taut nerves of man could stand no more.

Peter Gross pivoted slowly so that his eyes rested once more on the stricken herald.

"I am here, Njam," he said a fourth time, and now his voice was as silkily soft as Wobanguli's. "You thought the sea would hold me, but you forgot that I

am a child of the sea, who have sailed on every ocean as far as oceans extend. My mother did not desire me, Njam, so she returned me safely here"—his voice became sharp as steel—"to hear thy falsehoods, Njam, and thy traitorous perfidy."

A tremulous sigh ran through the multitude and the tension relaxed. This was not the ghost of their resident, then; it was the resident himself.

"I heard the message thou brought, Njam," Peter Gross continued, his voice gathering strength and denunciation. "I heard the words thou didst falsely impute to my commandant and thy governor when I am absent. I brand them here, and in thy presence, Njam, as a lie!

"Aye," he shouted as his passion mounted, "I brand thee here before the chiefs of Bulungan, before the council of the datos and kjais, as a liar and a father of lies, Njam! And I say to thee, Njam, that thou has made thyself viler than the vilest—aye, viler than he who gives stone for bread, for that man cheats for his own profit, but thou, Njam, hast lied to thy people whilst thou wert in their herald's garb."

As Peter Gross spoke the color began to flow back into Njam's cheeks and his back to straighten. When the resident first appeared he was under the popular misapprehension that he was confronted by a specter, but finding only flesh and blood against him, his courage rose in the confidence of numbers. Peter Gross's accusation, cutting like a lash, brought him to his feet with blazing eyes.

"Chiefs of Bulungan—" he shouted in a high-pitched voice, but his oration was cut short by a roar of "Silence!" from Peter Gross.

The resident's bared teeth were clenched. The nails of his fingers bit into his palms. It was apparent that he was restraining himself with difficulty from violent action.

"Njam," he cried hoarsely, "thou hast thy kris. I have naught but my naked hands. Now, if truth be in thee, strike me dead where I stand! And if truth be not in thee, let me make thee carrion for the vultures!"

There had been a movement in the rear of the hall before Peter Gross flung his challenge. A few moments more and it would have communicated itself throughout the audience, with the result that a torrent of Dyaks and Malays would have swept across the stage and pierced him with spears and kris. But at his bold declaration every voice was hushed and the men gazed eagerly at the Dattoo Njam.

For a moment Njam faltered. The very boldness of the challenge took his breath away—he suspected a trick. But seeing Peter Gross, apparently unarmed, he whipped his long, wavy blade from its sheath and sprang forward.

Just how it happened none of those in the audience knew. They saw the Malay's blade descend upon the resident's neck with that long, curving stroke that the Malay loves so well—a stroke that cuts deeply between the shoulder-blades and well-nigh severs a man's head from his body. But by some miraculous intervention, apparently, the kris did not fall where it should have. Instead it halted uncertainly a moment in mid air, spun, and described a graceful parabola, falling point down some distance in front of the stage. It almost transfixed a chief who was watching proceedings open-mouthedly.

Then a curious thing happened. Those who were watching saw Peter Gross spring lightly forward and grasp the Malay. They saw Njam swung off his feet and bent over Peter Gross's knee. The resident's right arm was about the Malay's legs and his left hand clutched him by the throat. Njam was struggling desperately with every ounce of his strength, but was obviously as helpless as a babe. Peter Gross bent him back slowly, while the Malay's face turned a dark blue and then black. In the tense silence Njam's gasps sounded like a rushing wind.

Peter Gross suddenly rose and tossed the gasping Njam on the floor. "Faugh, he's not worth it!" he exclaimed in the *lingua franca* of the islands. He turned

indifferently while Njam, contorted with pain, gasped for breath.

While the assembly remained spellbound, Peter Gross walked slowly toward Wobanguli.

"Raja," he said in a voice silken-soft, "we know each other of old. Thou art a wise man, raja"—there was a peculiar emphasis on the adjective—"thou art too wise to lead thy people into error. Thou art also a strong man, raja—strongest of thy people of Bulungan, I am told. I should like a contest of strength with thee, some time, raja, but not to-night—not to-night. To-night I would merely ask thee to bid these chiefs and princes to go to their homes in peace, to till their crops, and to trust in the eternal justice of their resident—that justice which thou knowest, raja, never changeth. And if there be petitions, let me hear them to-morrow. I listen, raja."

There were great drops of sweat on Wobanguli's face, although the hall was none too warm. He had watched with bulging eyes as the face of Njam turned from a light-brown shade to a purplish black. The thought of those sinews of Peter Gross at his own throat made him quake with terror. Once the strong man and bully of Bulungan, he was now so enervated with soft living that he could have put up only a poor fight against any of a dozen of the champions gathered in the hall. The thought of matching himself against Peter Gross fairly froze the blood in his veins.

He rose dry-lipped. Peter Gross's eyes rested on him caressingly. Wobanguli felt them running over his naked back and legs, shrewdly calculating just how much strength and vitality there lay stored in his flabby muscles. He moistened his lips and began:

"Kapalas of Bulungan, the hour is late. Let every man seek now his own bed. If there be those who have petitions to our resident let them come to-morrow."

He glanced toward Peter Gross to see whether any further announcement was necessary. The resident beckoned to him, and the raja approached servilely and

with unsteady step to receive a whispered instruction. He turned toward the chiefs again.

"Kjais and datoos of Bulungan," he announced, "we know it is a custom decreed by our *orang blanda* father in Batavia that the council remains in its place until the resident has passed out. Let every man stand!"

Stern and majestic as a Phidian Zeus, Peter Gross walked slowly between the lane of warriors to the door by which he had entered. It was a tense moment. He knew that the chiefs had him at their mercy, but there are times when that which is mere mortal cowers before the apparent superman. This was such an occasion.

As the door closed, Koyala barred it with strips of bamboo. She had hardly done so when there was a gentle pressure from within.

"Make haste!" she said. "We must get out of the Kampong before they find us."

They dashed along the gallery to the harem. A native lamp, provided by Koyala, was burning in the latter place. As Peter Gross wrenched aside the section of wall he had cut away a short time before, Koyala extinguished the lamp. A few moments later they were speeding through the shadows toward the postern gate.

A Dyak guard interposed himself between them and the entrance. "Ah Sing," Koyala whispered; it was the password. The guard gazed at her uncertainly. Concealing her features she darted outside. Elated to find his prize a woman, he sprang after her, but Peter Gross, emerging suddenly out of the darkness, launched a blow that caught him under the chin and stretched him out beyond further possibility of mischief.

"We must go back the way we came," Koyala whispered. "Hurry!"

Peter Gross did not waste time in expostulation, although personally he favored taking the main highway to the fort. He was confident that the Dyaks would be quiet for the night. It was not until they were safely in the marshes, however, that he ventured to mention this.

"You have strong arms," Koyala replied admiringly, her finger closing with a warm friendly pressure on his biceps. "But you are not immortal. Before you stopped speaking a chief of the Punans and one of the Long Wais slipped out of the hall. They had their sumpitans. What is to prevent them from shooting you with a poisoned arrow from the bush?"

"H-m!" Peter Gross muttered. "I thought they'd had enough for one night."

"The serpent is most dangerous when trodden on," Koyala rebuked.

When they finally reached the fort, Peter Gross urged Koyala to enter the gates with him.

"You must help me plan for to-morrow," he urged. "I want to know what you think I should say to the chiefs."

"It is impossible," she replied. "None but Naioh must know that I am here. Bid the white woman to keep it secret." The last sentence was pronounced with a certain viciousness.

"You know what is best," he replied. "But I am sorry you cannot come with me. I will tell Miss Coston to say nothing." He paused, and then offered his hand. She accepted it timidly.

"Once more, Koyala, I owe my life, and Bulungan owes her peace and welfare to you," he acknowledged. "I do not know how either Bulungan or I will ever be able to repay it."

Koyala jerked her head away.

"Let us not speak of debts, *mynheer!*" she cried hoarsely. "*Goedendag!*"

As her voice uttered the low farewell she darted across the *plein* enclosing the fort. The next moment the darkness swallowed her.

## CHAPTER XIV

### BEFORE THE DAWN

CAPTAIN CARVER was not fated to sleep that night. It was near sunrise when the familiar step he had waited so long to hear sounded outside his door. He hastily opened it.

"Thank God, Peter!" he fervently ejaculated, wringing the resident's hand like one welcoming a brother from the dead. There was no need of further words. These men, intimates and confidants for two years, knew each other as only men marooned from civilization can know. The highest praise that may be said for each is that the mutual respect engendered during the first few stormy weeks of their acquaintanceship, when they fought off Ah Sing and his Dyak hordes, had never diminished, but had ripened to a friendship like that of David and Jonathan.

"Is Miss Coston here?" Peter Gross inquired anxiously.

"She's sleeping soundly, I hope, at Lieutenant and Mrs. Van Vroot's quarters," Carver reassured, smiling. "Your Dyak wouldn't stay. Found the inside of four walls too stuffy, I presume."

"It's just as well," Peter Gross replied with relief. "How is Miss Coston? Did she reach here without mishap?"

Carver favored his superior with a swift, shrewd glance. There was just the suspicion of a smile on the soldier's gaunt, stern features.

"She's as well as could be expected, considering the journey she's made to-day," he replied. "A little fagged, but a good sleep will remedy that. She'll be as fresh as a daisy after siesta."

"She's had a hard time since the pirates took the Zuyder Zee," Peter Gross observed. "I suppose she told you everything."

"She's given us a pretty good account of everything except how she came to be separated from you," Carver replied. He spoke gravely, but there was a glint of humor in his eyes. Peter Gross noted it.

"I went to Bulungan with Koyala to attend the council of chiefs," he explained quietly. "Leaving her with Naioh does seem discourteous, but there was no alternative. My place was at the council."

"I understand," Carver replied quickly. His eyes sparkled with admiration. "I didn't expect to see you back when I learned where you had gone."

"I was a little doubtful myself whether I'd come back," Peter Gross confessed. "Of course I had the advantage of surprise, and was calculating on that. Once I had a chance to make myself heard it was quite easy, you see."

"I wouldn't have gone down among that wolf-pack for ten thousand guilders," Carver declared bluntly. "It was a damn fool thing you did, Peter, and a damned brave thing! I don't see now how you happen to be here. But go on and tell me about it."

"Of course I wasn't alone," Peter Gross pointed out.

"No, Koyala was with you. Where is she now?"

"She left me at the gate. Don't let it be known that she was here—she wants it kept secret."

"You can rely on me. But go on and spin your yarn. I'm dying to know how it all happened."

Peter Gross stretched his long legs and leaned back in luxuriant ease. It was good to have a comfortable chair under him again after a day's tramp in primeval jungle.

"Oh, there isn't much to tell!" he remarked.

Captain Carver shot him a keen, inquisitorial glance. When Peter Gross spoke this way it usually meant that big events had transpired in which he had taken a prominent part. But to discover his connection with these events was as arduous a task as extracting the rivets from an old boiler.



"Did you see the Raja Woganbuli?" Carver demanded.

"Yes."

"Did he say anything?"

"He made a very pretty little speech, advising the kjais and datoos to go to bed and present their petitions and grievances to-morrow."

"H-m!" Carver hummed. This was information indeed. Something portentous must have occurred to induce the Dyak ruler to change front in a few hours like this, he knew. He wondered how great a part Peter Gross had played in persuading the crafty raja to adopt this stand. Unable to restrain his impatience, he demanded pointblank:

"Peter, I want to hear your log of every confounded thing that happened since Koyala and you set out for Bulungan."

Peter Gross looked at him with a quizzical, almost boyish grin. Such language from a subordinate to a resident was almost *lese-majesty*, but then Carver and he were more than servants of the same state—they were friends. Besides, he knew exactly how eager the curiosity of the captain sometimes became.

"On condition, Charles Carver," he parried, "that you'll keep strictly to yourself whatever Miss Coston may have told you of our journey here." His color heightened a trifle. "Some of these fools may get to gossiping, and you know I'm not a woman's man."

"Of course not," Carver replied dryly. "I accept the condition."

Peter Gross stiffened under his friend's silent raillery. "We've got a big job before us," he announced severely. "Miss Coston's stepmother, a young lady about the same age as she, and her *fiancé* are Ah Sing's prisoners. I have promised her that we shall rescue them."

Carver's features underwent a quick transformation. "I didn't know that," he replied. "She didn't mention it. All she told was how you escaped and reached Bulungan. But go ahead with your story. It will be morning soon and we may have to change our plans."

Peter Gross described briefly what had occurred. As he mentioned the trip through the swamps Carver observed:

"You took an awful risk. You couldn't tempt even a swamp Dyak to go through that bog at night. I wouldn't have done it upon any condition."

"Unless you thought you could scotch this rebellion, as I did," Peter Gross returned with warm friendliness.

The captain's face broke into an appreciative grin as the resident described how Koyala had maneuvered their entrance into the *balais*. Njam's report, Peter Gross gave in a straight narrative form without comment or emendation.

"Njam said you told him that you intended to make the Moslems eat swine like Christians," he related.

"The cursed liar!" Carver exclaimed hotly. Recovering himself instantly he uttered an explosive "Go on!" and listened to the conclusion of the tale with tightly compressed lips.

"What did you say?" Peter Gross asked. Struggling to repress his feelings, Carver gave a brief and succinct account of his meeting with the Malay chief.

"I was sure he was lying," Peter Gross remarked at the close. "I'm glad to hear it happened this way. It makes me feel less regret at what I was forced to do." He related how he had disposed of Njam, omitting to mention, however, that the latter had a kris.

"Peter," Carver cried warmly when the tale was complete, "there isn't another man in all the East Indies could have done what you did there to-night. You haven't told me half, I know that. But I can fill in the holes after a fashion. If we get a measure of help now from Batavia this rebellion is broken. And there's but one man who broke it, and his name is Peter Gross."

"It was Koyala," Peter Gross negatived, shaking his head. "She planned it all. Without her I couldn't have done anything."

"She helped, but you put the fear of God in their

hearts!" Carver declared. "We have a great deal to thank her for. I wish there were some way of squaring our debt."

The blood-red banners of dawn were flaring in the eastern sky when Peter Gross dropped wearily into a cot for a few hours' rest. But sleep refused to come in spite of his physical exhaustion. He pondered over the events of the day and the stirring occurrences of the night. He speculated what the day before him might bring. The snake of rebellion was scotched but not killed, he knew. Wobanguli was in his hut hatching schemes, and beyond the jungle Ah Sing, the Yellow Spider, lay, watching events and spinning webs.

No considerations of honor, of past distinctions or immunities, and no tie of allegiance would restrain the raja from striking at the fort if he believed he could successfully overwhelm the little garrison and retain his foothold against the Dutch, Peter Gross knew. Wobanguli was wholly faithless, siding always with the strongest, more treacherous than a Punan, for a Punan never abuses hospitality, but the raja would sell his guests.

But even if the raja did decide it was to his advantage to side with the whites and called off his followers, there were the Malays and the independent chiefs to deal with, Peter Gross perceived. Men who have thrived on blood and violence for generations do not turn lightly from piracy and head-hunting to more peaceful agricultural pursuits, he knew. They had smelled blood. They demanded more. It was practically impossible to hold them, even with the raja's influence. His brain wearied with the vexing problem.

"Rebellion and reprisal, massacre and hangings, will be Bulungan's sad fate for many a long year yet," he sighed to himself. "They can't see how useless it all is—and how wasteful. My poor people!"

His thoughts reverted to the girl who slept under Fort Wilhelmina's sheltering roof for the first time. Incident by incident from the time he had first noticed her on the deck of the Zuyder Zee, he mentally re-

viewed all that had passed between them. He thought of her spirit and independence, of her cheerfulness and courage in adversity. He recalled her trust and confidence in him and her delicious repose in his arms as they journeyed through the jungle. Somewhere in this train of thought sleep stole over him and his fancies became dreams. The sun, peeping in through a crack in the blinds, saw a smile hovering over his face.

For all his sternness, and the furrows on his brow, and his serious abjuration of the gentler sex, Mynheer Peter Gross, resident of Bulungan, was no older than his twenty-seven years.

## CHAPTER XV

### PRISONERS

UNCEREMONIOUSLY hurled into his stateroom by the powerful hands of Peter Gross, Vincent Brady brought up against the outer wall with a thud that jarred the breath from his body. Straightening himself painfully, he sprang with savage fury at the closed door. As if in mockery of his efforts the lock clicked at that moment and he heard the sound of rapidly retreating footsteps.

Outside bedlam raged as the Dutch officers and sailors made their vain and ineffectual stand against the horde of maurauders that swept over the rail. Vincent was oblivious to these sounds. Grasping the handle of the door and planting one foot against the jamb, he strove to wrench it open. But, though light, it was honestly built, and resisted his utmost efforts. Mad with anxiety regarding Grace and Violet, he wasted precious moments in a futile endeavor to kick out the panels. It was not until resistance above decks had practically ceased and Peter Gross and Grace Coston were swimming shoreward that he bethought himself of forcing back the casing.

When he finally accomplished this and rushed out the corridor was in darkness. He groped his way to the deck, stumbling and bruising himself in his frantic haste. The pirates were grouping their captives, both the wounded and the non-resistant passengers who had been unhurt, on the aft-deck by the dim light of flambeaux and native lamps when Vincent, maddened by the thought of Grace taken captive, burst among them like a thunderbolt.

The onslaught was so sudden and unexpected that the Malays and Bajaus, crowding forward curiously to stare at their prisoners, were bowled over. Vincent thus reached the center of the group before a hand was reached out to seize him.

Slightly built and small in stature, he made a comparatively insignificant figure as he stood in the midst of the group of savages and their captives, gazing eagerly from face to face, and panting from his exertions.

"Where's Grace?" he demanded in a high-pitched voice as he recognized the missionary, John Bright, standing next to a Malay chief.

At the sound of his voice the amazed and stupefied pirates, astonished at the apparition in ruffled white flannels that had suddenly appeared so unceremoniously in their midst, recovered. A husky Bugi sprang forward with full intent to throttle the *orang blanda* bantam who so temerarily attacked the pirate crew. His intent was good, but he failed to take into account that one of the accomplishments some white men possess is a lusty wallop. As the Bugi reached for Vincent's throat, the latter's fist connected with his unguarded solar plexus and he sank to the deck without a moan.

The Malay standing next to John Bright lifted his kris and sprang forward to administer that terrible disemboweling stroke for which the inhabitants of the Malayan peninsula are so famous. But his blade was turned aside by John Bright, who caught his arm and pulled him back. The missionary uttered a low plea in a tongue that was jargon to Vincent.

"Where are Miss Coston—and Mrs. Coston?" the young man cried again in frantic agony, oblivious to his own danger.

"Safe, safe," the gruff voice of Jim Poggs, the trader, admonished. "Keep quiet or they'll spit you."

The Malay chief at that moment gave a rapid order. Three of his followers leaped forward simultaneously and pinioned Vincent's arms to his sides. He was borne

to the deck, ropes were produced, and in a twinkling he was trussed as safely as a mule on a lighter. The Malay chief watched the operation in grim silence. When it was completed he said in his own tongue to the missionary:

"He hath more valor than discretion. But I will pardon him because he is young and because thou has asked it, Healer of Souls!"

"Are they here?" Vincent cried from his recumbent position on the deck. A Malay bent swiftly and thrust an evil-smelling rag into his mouth.

The deck was swarming with brown-skinned marauders who stopped to gaze a moment curiously at the captives and then hurried away in their search for treasure, ransacking the ship from stem to stern. The Malay chief uttered a curt order, and the captives were led to the rail and lowered into a proa alongside. Vincent and Poggs were thrust into a small cubicle, less than five feet high, foul-smelling and dark as pitch. As the Malays bundled them in there was a frightened gasp from the side opposite the narrow door.

"Mrs. Coston?" Poggs inquired sharply.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" was the relieved exclamation. "Who is this with us, Mr. Poggs?"

"Mr. Brady," the trader explained on hands and knees beside Vincent, whose bonds he was endeavoring to untie. "They've got him roped. Just a minute and I'll get rid of this gag, then he can talk to you."

Finding the knot stubborn the trader whipped out a pocket-knife and solved the tangle by Alexander's method. Vincent spat the vileness from his mouth.

"Violet, have you seen anything of Grace?" he cried in a voice keen with anguish.

"Not since we left the deck together," Mrs. Coston sobbed hysterically. "Vincent, isn't this terrible? We'll be eaten!"

"Have you seen her?" Vincent demanded, turning on the trader. "You said she was safe. Where is she?"

"The last I saw of her," the trader replied tactfully, "she was on deck with Mrs. Derringer. That was just

as the ruction commenced. She's probably been shipped on ahead in another proa. They were a little slow in getting us together, and that's how you came to find us still on the ship."

"For God's sake untie these ropes so that I can go and find her!" Vincent cried.

Poggs, who had been endeavoring to locate the cords as best he could in the intense blackness of their prison pen, suddenly desisted.

"I don't think I will," he announced cheerfully, stretching his legs out ahead of him and putting his back against the wall. "I dunno but what that heathen's notion of trussing you up was pretty good, after all. When you calm down summat, maybe we can make you more comfortable, but I'm not going to take any chances letting you run out of here and getting your head chopped off."

"Damn you!" Vincent swore. "Loosen my hands!"

"Thank you, no!" Poggs replied with unimpaired cheerfulness.

"Violet, can you help me get one hand free," the helpless captive pleaded. As she timidly took a step forward in response to his plea, Poggs shifted his position to interpose his form between her and Vincent.

"No, ma'am, I'm not going to let you," he announced firmly. "When Mr. Brady develops some hoss sense and decides ag'in' fighting the whole pirate combination, we can cut away these ropes. But not before."

"Vincent, will you be reasonable?" Violet implored.

"To blazes with reason," he raged, writhing and tugging futilely at his bonds. Poggs seized him and arrested his struggles.

"Don't be a fool, Mr. Brady!" he advised sharply. "John Bright can do more for the little miss by keeping friends with the *juragan* of this proa than you could if you had a whole regiment back of you. Leave it to the missionary, he's doing all that can be done."

Vincent ceased his mad struggles, though he kept tugging at his bonds. Poggs sat by philosophically. Violet, squatting in the corner, indulged in quiet sob-



bing. To reassure her the trader presently broke the silence with the remark:

"Don't be afraid, ma'am, we're not coming to any harm. If they intended to get rid of us they wouldn't have taken all the trouble they have."

"But they may be cannibals!" she exclaimed afrightedly.

Poggs chuckled. It was the first expression of amusement that had crossed his lips since the attack, and it did more to hearten the thoroughly frightened little widow than anything he said.

"They're pirates, but they're not cannibals, ma'am. Pirating is considered a perfectly respectable business among some of these Malay Moslems who'd no more think of eating a Christian than they would of eating pork."

"But why are we here?" Mrs. Coston asked fearfully.

Poggs shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know myself, ma'am. Maybe they're going to hold us for ransom. When Mr. Bright comes back he'll probably be able to tell us."

Cheered at this, Violet gradually ceased her sobbing. Vincent continued tugging at the ropes that held his wrists. One hand was nearly free when the door of their pen was opened and the figure of the missionary appeared. He was smiling quizzically, and carried a smoking native lamp.

"Room for one more?" he asked.

"Have you heard anything?" Vincent beseeched imploringly.

The missionary shook his head. "The *juragan* knows nothing about her," he said. "All the prisoners are presumed to be on this vessel, and she is not here."

"Then she's—" Vincent began wildly, lifting a harrowed face from the floor of the cabin. Words failed him.

"There are two unaccounted for," John Bright announced gravely, "she and the young man who discussed Borneo with me this afternoon as we were passing Cape Kumungun. The *jurangan* reports that one of his crew

reported seeing two people swimming toward shore as they were approaching the Zuyder Zee. It may be they escaped that way."

"But where could they go?" Mrs. Coston asked.

"The young man seemed to know Borneo," John Bright replied. "If it was he with Miss Coston, there is a possible chance that they may get to Bulungan, if they fall in with friendly Dyaks."

Vincent had ceased tugging at the ropes. The galling bonds no longer irritated him now that he knew positively that Grace was not aboard. He lay face down on the vile floor, the prey of the keenest agony that a strong man can feel, the agony of uncertainty at a loved one's fate.

So the dreary night passed and dawn found the lone woman and three men huddled about the smoking lamp, cramped and utterly spent, but sleepless with anxiety.

Shortly after the sun rose the proa turned suddenly shoreward and darted into a little inlet effectually screened by overhanging trees. An observer a hundred yards from shore would not have guessed that a break existed ahead of him in the jungle wall, beyond which lay a harbor and the lair of the pirate, Ah Sing. The prisoners were kept below while the entrance was being made, for the wily *jurangan* had no intention of revealing the secret of the inlet to even a captive. After a brief run through a zigzag channel, over which lofty branches and creepers formed a leafy arch, the proa shot into a broad lagoon. On the opposite shore lay the city on stilts that Ah Sing and his pirate horde had built in secret while they were preparing to seize Bulungan and exact their toll on the commerce of the East Indies.

Once they were inside the harbor the *jurangan* permitted them the freedom of the deck of his proa. It was not long, however, before the rising sun drove them below, for the torrid rays, reflected by the placid surface of the lagoon, were wholly unendurable to northern eyes.

Thus they missed seeing the Zuyder Zee, manned by

her pirate captors, steam into the harbor out of the same narrow channel by which they had entered. It approached the city slowly, and came to anchor a short distance from where the proa lay.

John Bright was attempting to cheer the depressed group huddled below deck by relating humorous anecdotes of his varied career as a missionary in the East Indies when the Malay chief, who acted as *juragan* of the proa, approached and interrupted with a harsh jargon. Bright listened attentively, and asked a question in the same tongue, to which the chief nodded assent. The missionary then turned toward his fellow captives.

"The datoo tells me," he announced, "that we are to be transferred from this proa to our old quarters on the Zuyder Zee. There are other white captives here, he informs me, who will be confined with us on the ship as soon as they can be moved from shore."

"Is Grace among them?" Vincent asked eagerly.

"I am sorry to say she is not," the missionary replied. "We and those of the crew who survived are the only white prisoners taken from the Zuyder Zee. The Danish gentleman and the young man who was the captain's guest are missing. The former was killed, I think, for he took part in the fighting. I saw him using a revolver. The prisoners the datoo refers to are those taken previously from the Dordrecht and from coasters."

"What will be done with us?" Violet Coston asked anxiously.

The missionary smiled. "I do not know as yet, and the datoo says he cannot tell me," he replied. "But the fact that we have not suffered any serious mistreatment, outside of a little discomfort, and that we are to be supplied with our old quarters on board the packet is encouraging."

"Funny thing for those devils to do!" Pogg's muttered lugubriously. "I'm afraid there's something back of this."

"Their conduct toward us is quite unpiratical, I'll agree," the missionary replied cheerfully. "But I'm in-

clined to take an optimistic view of what the future has in store for us. I believe that they have more serious intentions against our pocketbooks than our persons."

"You mean that they will demand a ransom?" Vincent asked.

"Exactly."

The datoo, who had been listening with evident impatience to this conversation, interrupted with a harsh question addressed to John Bright. The missionary assented.

"We must go on deck," he announced, rising. The others followed him, the datoo closing the rear. Violet clung to Vincent's arm. A grinning Bugi led them to the rail where a tambangan lay. With an agility remarkable for a man of his age, John Bright sprang into the smaller vessel and held out his arms to assist Violet. The latter shrinking fearfully under the bold stares of the burly, half-clad marauders, clung to him for protection.

The missionary was the first man on board the deck of the Zuyder Zee, and cast an anxious glance about the deck. The next moment he heaved a sigh of relief, for all evidences of the bloody fight the night before had been removed. His voice therefore rang cheerfully as he urged the others to join him.

A powerful Manchu was in command of the craft. He was evidently an experienced seaman and knew steam, for he had the vessel as neat as a pin. He carried himself with all the dignity of a liner captain as he watched the captives come aboard and ceremoniously greeted John Bright. There was a brief conversation, then both bowed, and Bright and his fellow captives were led below.

"What did the old codger want?" Vincent asked curiously.

"It seems he has heard of my work in Sarawak," the missionary replied, smiling. "He expressed his regret that it was necessary that I be held captive for a time until some disposition was made of the prisoners taken."

"I can't make it out," Pogs declared with a puzzled

shake of his head. "There's something back of all this politeness."

The afternoon passed slowly. Vincent and Violet and John Bright and Pogg's chafed at their enforced inaction and indulged in endless surmises on what was in store for them. Vincent was like a caged tiger, pacing the deck hour after hour, and eating his heart out with anxiety as to Grace's fate. When the others tried to quiet him and divert his thoughts, he irritably turned aside their well-meant efforts until they left him alone.

Toward sundown John Bright came upon Vincent as the latter stood near the bows and gazed fixedly shoreward.

"I wouldn't do it if I were you, Mr. Brady," the missionary remarked quietly. "You haven't a chance."

"What do you mean?" Vincent snapped.

"Make any attempt to escape. That is what you were contemplating, was it not?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Vincent demanded, ignoring the question.

The missionary glanced about the deck.

"Doesn't it occur to you that we are rather lightly guarded?" he asked. "We have practically the run of the ship. Isn't it likely that there is some good reason for such leniency?"

"You mean they don't care whether we try to escape?" Vincent demanded.

The missionary looked fixedly toward the shore. "This is a freshwater lagoon," he remarked. "I have no doubt but what it teems with crocodiles. If one should try to escape it would afford a few minutes' diversion for those on deck and the loungers ashore. That is all."

"If I could lay my hands on a boat," Vincent remarked, more to himself than to the missionary.

"The village is located in the heart of a great morass which stretches in both directions along the coast," the missionary declared. "I do not know just where we are, but I have an approximate idea. I can safely assert that there is not one chance in a thousand for a man

who does not know the trails to cross the morass to the high ground beyond. Our keeper knows he needs no guard over us. Nature itself has provided barriers more powerful than any man could construct."

"Should I give up all hope of finding Miss Coston?" Vincent cried.

"Patience," the missionary counseled. "We will secure our release eventually. I cannot believe that He who knoweth the sparrow's fall will desert us in this hour of need!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### AH SING'S THREAT

A GRAY pallor of night hung over Ah Sing's city and the broad and placid expanse of the lagoon, where the Zuyder Zee lay at anchor in the midst of a bevy of proas and smaller craft like a hen squatting among her chicks. The pale moon shone down from an almost cloudless sky. Not a creature stirred on the packet's deserted deck, and the proas floated gently at anchor with none to keep watch over them.

In the shadows thrown by the awnings overhead a lone figure skulked. It proceeded cautiously, a step at a time, toward the stern. It was the figure of a man in European garb, and he carried his shoes between his teeth. At each advance he halted a moment, listening keenly for a shuffling footstep or other alarm. But his slow progress along the length of the deck was seemingly unobserved.

Reaching the rail he looked around cautiously, then gave a quick glance over the side. A smile of satisfaction irradiated his features. Noiseless as a cat he swung himself over the rail and dropped into one of the two tambangans floating there. With a stroke of his knife he cut the twisted fiber cable by which the native craft was attached to the larger ship. Seizing one of the two paddles lying in the bottom of the tambangan he began urging it with awkward strokes toward the shore.

Vincent Brady had set out on his quest for his betrothed.

The tambangan had only proceeded a little way when another figure appeared on the deck of the packet.

Quietly, but without employing the extreme measures of precaution that Vincent had taken, John Bright walked to the stern and watched the progress of the younger man. As Vincent neared shore the missionary swung over the vessel's side into the other tambangan. Unloosing the fiber cable and picking up a paddle he struck out in the same direction which the American had taken.

Reaching shore, Vincent threw his paddle aside and looked about uncertainly. He was on a narrow ridge of white sand flanked on one side by the lagoon and on the other by a reed-grown pool that extended for a considerable distance in both directions. As he paused on its brink, debating which way he should go, it occurred to him that he could cross the pool in the tambangan. Turning around to recover his paddle he perceived with dismay that another tambangan was rapidly approaching from the packet.

Maddened by the thought of being ignominiously carried back to the ship he had just left, he grasped hold of the bow of the heavy craft and, by exerting his full strength, hauled it over the ridge and into the pond. As he did so a low hail came to him from across the water. Disregarding it he sprang into the dugout and began paddling desperately toward the opposite shore.

The shallow, reed-grown expanse was less than two hundred yards wide. Its inner bank was fringed by a wall of mangroves, whose thickly interwoven aerial roots presented a solid wall through which no boat could pass. Driving the tambangan among them, Vincent caught hold of the nearest root and began climbing it with the full intent of putting as much space between himself and his pursuers as possible.

In the open the moon furnished a mild illumination, but here, in the mangrove swamp, abysmal blackness reigned. The damp, slimy roots provided an uncertain footing, and Vincent found it necessary to crawl along on his belly like a snake. In his fear that he might be recaptured and brought back to the packet he gave no thought to the danger he was running. That the



morass must be infested with poisonous reptiles, and that crocodiles might be lurking below and leopards and pythons in the branches above never occurred to him.

He was crawling from one root to another when he felt himself slipping. He clutched desperately at the root to which he was clinging, but the slimy surface afforded him no grip. As he frantically reached out into the black void for a more firm hold the water closed over his shoetops. The next moment he found himself thigh-deep in the morass and sinking.

Awakened suddenly to his danger, he made a desperate effort to stay his descent by clinging to the root. But its smooth surface slipped away under his palms and the water mounted to his armpits. Too late he thought of John Bright's warning. Face to face with a horrible death in the loathsome swamp he lifted an agonized face heavenward and cried:

"Oh, God! what will become of Grace?"

John Bright's tambangan crashed against the wall of mangrove roots at that moment.

"Mr. Brady?" he cried anxiously.

Vincent uttered a hysterical sob of relief.

"Here," he said. "I'm caught in a quicksand."

Bright struck a match. It revealed Vincent standing shoulder deep in a miry pool, with the long, snake-like roots of the mangroves rising around him. In the ghostly darkness they seemed like tentacles of huge octopi.

A little to one side Bright spied an opening in the wall of mangrove roots. With a dextrous stroke of his paddle he directed his tambangan toward it, bidding Vincent, meanwhile in subdued, cheery tones, to keep up courage. A few moments later the tambangan nosed its way next to the young man.

"Lift your arms and hold on to the nearest root," the missionary commanded. Vincent did as he was instructed. Bright deftly passed a cord around him, under the armpits, and then edged the tambangan toward a near-by tree-trunk. Wedging the craft firmly between

several root arms, he sprang for the base of the tree with the other end of the rope in his hand.

"Now pull yourself up," the missionary directed. At the same time he exerted his full strength.

The rope tightened around Vincent's chest, cutting off his breath. He strove his utmost to get a firm grip on the slimy roots that constantly slipped away beneath his fingers. The water boiled and bubbled as the missionary swung him now this way and now that.

"We're gaining," Vincent gasped.

"Once more!" the missionary cried between breaths. There was a mighty heave and Vincent was drawn up against a gnarled root. With the missionary's assistance he half clambered and half rolled into the tambangan. Panting, Bright wiped the moisture from his forehead.

Without a word of reproof he stepped into the tambangan and poled his way out into the pond. A few strokes of the paddle brought them to where the craft Vincent had taken lay. The missionary took this in tow.

"Can't I help?" Vincent asked shamefacedly, realizing the ignominy of his failure.

"You may take a paddle," the missionary replied. "It will keep you warm." The young man was shivering, for the night was chill.

They paddled in silence across the pond to the narrow spit of sand and hauled their tambangans across.

"Are we going back to the Zuyder Zee?" Vincent asked hopelessly.

"Not until you take a bath," the missionary replied quietly. "You'll have to get rid of that mud. I'll watch for crocodiles."

Five minutes in the warm water at the edge of the lagoon removed most of the mire from Vincent's clothing. This done, John Bright nodded inexorably toward the tambangan.

"Isn't there some way of crossing the swamp?" Vincent implored.

"Not without a guide," the missionary replied. "As I told you this afternoon, you must give up that

thought. If we are to escape it must be some other way."

"But there is no other way, you say?"

"We must trust in Providence to show us a way!" Bright replied.

"How did you know I was trying to escape?" Vincent asked a few moments later as they were paddling quietly toward the packet.

"I was expecting it, my lad," the old man replied in a kindly voice. "So I watched for you."

"Then nobody else on board knows?"

"I hope not. Quiet now."

They stole silently around to the stern of the vessel where John Bright fastened the two tambangans. Then they stealthily climbed aboard and tiptoed to their respective cabins.

Hidden in the shadows the Manchu commander of the Zuyder Zee watched them glide by. He made no sound, but a peculiar smile of quaint Oriental humor illumined his features.

As dawn was breaking a slim yacht glided into the harbor. A wild yell of exultation broke forth from those on shore. It was repeated and grew in volume as natives tumbled out of their houses and ran to the waterfront.

Ah Sing, the conquering hero, was returning home.

Those on board the Zuyder Zee watched the yacht with anxious eyes, fearfully hopeful of getting a glimpse of their dread captor. But Ah Sing did not show himself. Kjais and datos in gayly decorated proas and wearing their most gorgeous finery came and went to the yacht in an unending procession, but none stayed more than a few minutes. Presently a proa shot from the yacht and made toward the packet.

"We'll be knowing our fate now in a few minutes," Poggs remarked to the little group of his fellow prisoners gathered at the rail.

A kiai resplendent in a sarong of scarlet silk embroidered with gold boarded the packet and advanced toward her Manchu captain with stately tread. A

brief colloquy followed between the two, whereupon the kjai left. Presently the prisoners were summoned to the captain's quarters. They filed in singly, John Bright in the lead, with a Chinaman carrying a mace closing the rear. As the missionary entered he cast a sharp glance at their keeper, but gleaned nothing from the latter's imperturbable features.

The Manchu questioned them regarding their names and residences. Then he asked each as to his wealth, omitting only the missionary. Vincent answered for Violet, naming a comparatively small sum as the total of her possessions. The Manchu smiled.

The interrogation completed, the commander glanced benevolently at the missionary.

"You, my brother, are poor," he announced. "Your life has been one of giving and not of getting. Your many deeds of mercy are known to him whom we obey. Therefore, let there be no talk of ransom between us. Yet you must tarry with us a while, because you know things that are of value to those who hate us."

He shot a stern glance at Poggs.

"A hundred thousand guilders is thy credit at Batavia, is it not, Mynheer Poggs?" he asked blandly. "Then a hundred thousand guilders must thou pay."

His glance shifted to Vincent.

"Thou art wealthier than thou wottest, my friend," he observed gently. "Five hundred thousand guilders is the price that Ah Sing asks for thy freedom. And as for the woman"—he glanced coolly at the shrinking Violet—"she is fair, she is dainty. The *orang blanda* prize highly their womankind. Let her ransom be five hundred thousand guilders also."

"Where do you think that amount of money is coming from?" Vincent demanded hotly.

The Manchu quelled him with a look.

"You will write a cable to your bankers now, each of you," he announced calmly. "You will direct that these funds be paid to a certain firm whose name and address we will supply. The payment must be made within ten days from this date."

"And if it isn't paid?" Vincent demanded.

The Manchu's eyes narrowed.

"In the old days," he replied softly, "there were torturers who had great cunning in prolonging the agonies of human flesh. But I assure you that no torturer has ever lived who had greater cunning than our illustrious captain, the Sultan, Ah Sing."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE COUNCIL'S DECISION

**B**ULUNGAN was astir early the morning following the pasar. Its inhabitants might have been excused for extending their repose until the sun had completed half the morning's quadrant on account of the events of the day before, but sleep leaped nimbly from their eyelids at times like these. Pasar had been full of thrills, reaching a climax in the conclave of chiefs at the huge *balais*. Few of the natives had any clear idea of what had transpired there, but rumor was thick and fast and each magnified its predecessor.

The *Orang Blanda Kapala*, Mynheer Peter Gross, had come back from the dead. The sea had given up his ghost, and he had suddenly appeared at the meeting and torn his traducers apart like one would tear a baked *ikan*-fish. He was as tall as a durian tree and his limbs as huge as the trunk of a banyan. Gonong Lumut dwelt in his *kalalungan* (soul) and inspired him to prophesy. The *Bintang Burung* had been seen flitting like a gray ghost through the air and uttering dreadful cries.

There were other stories more cheerful than these. Men told with relish how the great ship that smokes, of the *orang blanda*, had been captured by that redoubtable chieftain, Ah Sing. They uttered his name in whispers, for the dread of his vengeance still hung heavily over the land, although he had not been heard from in two years.

That something had happened at the council every one was agreed. For the chiefs had stolen out swiftly at a late hour with their knives and padangs and sumpitans and had hastened out of the city toward the *plaats* of the *orang blanda*. Later they had returned by twos

and threes, none too cheerful, to be sure, and grimly silent on the events of the night. Wobanguli had enjoined strict secrecy upon them.

So surmise and conjecture grew and the seller of silks lingered over his pot of *agar-agar* and his cakes dipped in oil of kawan fruit while he exchanged opinions with the keeper of the stall. The Chinamen blinked placidly at passers-by, and kept the blinds ready to be put up at a moment's notice. The fishermen congregated at the *vissers-markt* and speculated on the effect war would have upon their trade. Warriors must eat, they argued, and no meat is so readily portable as sun-baked fish in a palm-leaf bag.

On the other hand, piracy bred hazards, the outlaws would require tribute, and business would suffer. Opinions like this were repeated *ad nauseam*.

And the women—what a feast for cackling tongues!

The streets were full of them, clad in their brightest garments, their shrill trebles vying in volume with the hilarious cacophony of the dogs. Had Bulungan contained an inhabitant who preferred rest to a holiday, he must have inevitably been forced to flee to the jungle.

The sun was about three hours high when the chiefs and their followers began trooping to the assembly-hall. As each of the rulers approached the gate the assembled crowd expressed critical opinion on the showing he made. The Malays on their coal-black, gayly caparisoned horses, imported from Lombock, received generous applause. The sea Dyak chiefs, borne in gaudy palanquins, made scarcely less show. But the hill Dyaks, who gained a precarious existence in the inland jungles and therefore had small opportunity for either commerce or free-booting like their more fortunate neighbors along the seashore, presented a sorry appearance in their scant and shabby chawats.

When a little Puna chief trotted up on foot with his half-naked followers he was greeted with derisive smiles and mocking jeers. He waited silently with tightly compressed lips until the gate was opened for him, then

turned slowly and searched out the mockers in the crowd with keen, coal-black eyes, glittering like an angry cobra's. The jeers suddenly ceased and a hush came over the mob. Those who had been most vociferous with their taunts slunk away. It is more than a tradition in Borneo that the Dyak of the hills never forgives an insult, and never forgets.

Upon entering the hall the chiefs stalked to their accustomed places and waited with grim taciturnity for the appearance of the raja. Everyone was heavily armed and carried his kris lightly in its palm-leaf sheath. A shadow of impending events hung heavily over the Assembly; the very atmosphere was electric with tension.

In the center of the stage stood a small table on which rested an ironwood bowl containing a ruddy, turbid liquid. The bowl was elaborately carved with the figures of the Dyak Pantheon, Djath and the elements of good contending with Budjang Brandi and the hosts of evil. Beside the bowl lay the public talismans, the sacred relics of the ancestors. When a pact was made these were dipped in blood to seal it. Dyak and Malay alike gazed thoughtfully at the bowl.

The Malays sat by themselves. Njam, their leader, glowered at the floor, his face as dark as a thundercloud.

Presently there was a low, monotonous beating of drums. It gradually increased in volume. *Tom-tom-tom!* the drums boomed, and more sharply, *Tom-tom-tom!* And again: *Tom-tom-tom, tom-tom-tom!*

There was a faint stir among the assembly, then a general stiffening. The raja was entering.

Though a coward, utterly unprincipled, and faithless to everyone and everything save his own interest, the raja looked every inch a king. Taller by half a head than any other man present, well-proportioned, his features regular, and his skin a healthy bronze, he was endowed by nature with those gifts that win and retain the confidence of aborigines. Saul, the son of Kis, was no more admired by the Israelites of his day than



this swarthy ruler was by the show-loving Dyaks of Bungalow. Keenly conscious of his people's childish love of pageantry and royal show, he captivated their hearts by dressing himself in gorgeous trappings on state occasions like these. Thus every Dyak swelled with pride in his handsome ruler, as Wobanguli walked with stately tread to the center of the stage.

The raja paused impressively while the subject chiefs made their obeisances. At a sign, native boys clad in blue and green chawats trotted in and passed cigarettes, betel, and sirih. A witch doctor clad in the skin of a tiger, his face buried in the tiger's head, entered and placed various articles in a double semicircle on the floor—a pargam's tail-feather, a piece of coral, a bit of meteoric rock, the tip of a leopard's tail, and the wing of a foxbat. He walked around these, slowly at first, gradually faster, and finally in a dizzy pirouette, humming the while a weird refrain that mounted in volume as it ran up the scale.

Stopping abruptly, he began a series of incantations. His voice was lifted in appeal to Djath, to the *hantu token*, and to the god of fire that dwelt in Gunong Agong. A frenzy seized him, he yelled, he screamed, he tore his hair and lacerated his arms and legs with a sharp-pointed device. Frothing at the lips he finally sank in utter exhaustion at the foot of the stage.

The Dyaks watched the performance with deep reverence. The Malays looked on impassively with more or less of scorn and disgust depicted upon their features. As true believers they had very little patience with the idolatrous practices of their despised allies.

Wobanguli rose majestically. His eyes swept the vast assembly, searching out every man. Not a chief there but had the impression that the raja had singled him out of the multitude as the one person in whom he had implicit faith and confidence. Although untutored in the art of public speaking, Wobanguli had the priceless gift of knowing intuitively how to sway men of his race and color. He won his audience before he opened his lips.

"Men of Bulungan and Borneo," he began, using the mongrel speech of the coast towns instead of chaste Dyak, so that all might understand, "ye have come from the cities and from the *dessas*; ye have come from the hills and from the marshes; ye have come from the farthest jungles and from the isles which our mother, *Laut*, the sea, sprinkles with pearls of sea-foam, to speak the thoughts of our people and to tell us of the good that has come to them, and of the ill, during the days of the *orang blanda* rule. The Punans and the Bukits are here from their far distant *negris*, the Kyans from the upper reaches of the rivers, each from his own *sungei*, the Kenyahs from the Tohen Batu, the Tamans of the cities who make our *krises* and *padangs*, and the Ibans and Tunjungs who sail the seas in proas. Ye are all here to-day, the glory and greatness of Bulungan, before whose might the islands bow and even distant Cathay makes obeisance, sending silks.

"And ye are met with us as brothers," he declared, turning to the Malays. "Ye are brothers who breathe the same air and draw nourishment from the same soil as we." Rich and resonant, his voice rose and fell as he dilated upon the past alliances and blood brotherhoods of Malay and Dyak, subtly interweaving the thought that the two races were branches of a common stock fated to defend their joint heritage against the white man. As he enlarged on his theme the Dyaks leaned forward eagerly, drinking in every word, and the stern features of the Malays softened while their backs stiffened with fierce racial pride.

Having won his audience, Wobanguli touched upon the golden age of piracy, prior to Peter Gross's coming. His reference was politic. Not by word or gesture did he commit himself. He contrasted these years with the two that had just passed, when every warrior was forced to earn a living.

The Dyaks began fingering their spears and the Malays stroked the handles of their *krises*. The pent-up savagery of two years was impatient for expression. But the wily Wobanguli was not yet ready

for action by the council. Pitching his voice in a higher key he shouted:

"Blood brothers of Bulungan, to-day we have a message from the gods. Djath spoke to me last night in a dream. Lo, I will tell you the manner of the dream, and then I will ask the holy *bilian* here to interpret the meaning of the dream."

Lowering his lids, as though to shut out all outside influence, and speaking like one in a trance, he narrated:

"This is the manner of my dream. It was night, and sleep, the life-giver, was far from my eyelids. I rose and cast off my mat and walked to the seashore. By and by a thirst came upon me and I looked about for a pitcher plant that I might drink. But there was none, only a barren waste of coral on which naught can grow. Faint with the thirst, I turned inland to seek the cooling jungle. But as I walked the trees fled before me, and the coral desert ran ahead of my feet.

"As I ran, thinking only of the terrible thirst that burned me like a fire, a foxbat flew out of the night into my face. In my confusion I chanced to look upward and beheld on a rock directly above me a leopard crouched to spring. I cried to Djath for aid and in answer to my prayer a ball of fire fell and consumed the leopard. Then I awoke, and as I lay there shivering, and wondering at the meaning of the dream, I found on my pillow the emblem of the great Djath, the tail-feather of a pargam."

Turning to the witch doctor, he cried dramatically:

"Now, holy *bilian*, tell us the meaning of the dream."

"Listen to me, O raja!" the witch-doctor cried, rising like one awakening from a trance. "The coral thou sawest stretching out endlessly before thy feet and driving back the jungle was the *orang blanda*, for lo, are they not driving our people from the soil of their fathers? The thirst that came upon thee was the weariness of thy people of the *orang blanda* rule. The leopard thou sawest was him who dwells in the *plaats* beyond, our *Orang Blanda Kapala*, for has he not the

stealth and cunning of a leopard?" (He asked the question venomously.) "Djath saved thee with a stone of fire from heaven." His long, lean arm and extended finger shot forth from beneath the tiger skin as he cried: "Strike thy enemy then, in Djath's name. He sent thee his token, the pargam's tail-feather, in a dream; do as the god bids thee."

The assembly was breathless. Even the Moslem Malays were impressed by this tale of a dream and its interpretation. They were of too superstitious a race wholly to give up their belief in omens and portents in the acceptance of Islamism.

Wobanguli appeared to be torn between doubts. He sat with his head in his hand, as though pondering deeply. A young Punan, unable to stand the strain, leaped impetuously forward and shook his spear.

"Give us war, raja, give us war!" he cried. "Speak and see how quickly we will pull down the leopard from yonder height."

"War, war, give us war!" a dozen voices shouted.

"War! War!" rose again the cry, taken up and repeated by Malay and Dyak. They sprang forward, animated by a common impulse, no longer preserving the decorum of assembly, but determined to force the raja to accede to their demand. They stormed the dias with raised kris and spears and shouted themselves hoarse.

Wobanguli raised his hand for silence. In that shrieking bedlam with men clambering over each other to reach the stage it was difficult to obtain order, but finally all throats were hushed. As though anxious to remove a final doubt before rendering a decision, he asked the witch-doctor:

"What, then, holy father, is the meaning of the foxbat?"

"That Djath should send his humble one, meaning me, to counsel thee to strike now, ere it be too late, and the leopard pounce down upon thee," the witch-doctor announced triumphantly.

A yell, wilder and fiercer than any that had been

uttered before, greeted the interpretation. The natives leaped up and shouted like men gone mad. When the tumult was at its height Wobanguli stepped forward and raised his hand for silence. But as he did so another figure suddenly materialized at the entrance back of the stage and swiftly crossed the platform. A magic name sprang simultaneously from the throats of all present:

"Koyala!"

She was clad wholly in white. The costume was purely Bornean and simplicity itself. Unlike other Dyak women, she wore no ornaments—her marvelous beauty was sufficient adornment. A plain band of gold caught her hair.

A hush fell upon the assembly. The witch-doctor, who had been the wildest dancer in the mad frenzy that followed the completion of his interpretation, shrank back on one of the long, low benches and tried to efface himself in the crowd. Koyala did not cast a glance in his direction.

"What is it, my people?" she asked sorrowfully in rich, chaste Dyak. "What do I hear you say? Do you speak of war? War for unhappy Bulungan? Your homes to be ravaged and your fields devastated? The rice to be burned ere it ripens? Your bodies to feel wounds? Your daughters to be sold as slaves? The proud Malay to lord it over you and make the wealth of your forests and fields his?"

A low, guttural murmur of dissent and disapprobation rose as she paused. It was evident that her message was not falling upon sympathetic ears.

"We have heard the voice of Djath, *bilian*," the suave voice of Wobanguli interrupted. "Djath bids us strike and save our people and our fields. It is Djath we obey. The die is cast, *bilian*. Djath hath spoken to me in a dream, and there is naught more to say."

If the raja expected to silence her by his utterance, he was badly mistaken. She turned on him with blazing eyes and demanded scornfully:

"Who has interpreted the words of Djath unto

thee, raja? This false priest, this muddler here?" She pointed a finger of scorn at the shrinking witch-doctor. "Dost thou prefer his word to mine, raja? Dost thou place him before me, who am keeper of the mysteries, who knoweth the innermost secrets from the most ancient of times, who am a granddaughter of Chawatangi?"

The raja flushed under his swarthy skin, but tried to maintain his dignity.

"Djath spoke to me in a dream, *bilian*," he began, but Koyala did not permit him to proceed.

"Was it the dream the *hantu token* related to me in the still hours last night?" she demanded. "A dream of two men who sat in a hut with a lamp between them and talked of coral and a leopard, and a paragam's tail-feather?"

Wobanguli's face turned a sickly yellow. His knees quaked, and he looked like a man about to collapse. It did not occur to him that Koyala might have eavesdropped. Believing in her supernatural powers he was ready to accept that the *hantu token*, her own familiar spirit, had revealed to her the scheme which he and the witch-doctor had planned during the night.

The Malays, however, saved him. Quick to grasp the threat to his cause, Njam and his brother datooos began a frantic demonstration for war. "War, war, give us war," the Malays shouted. "Death to the *orang blanda*." The Dyaks took up the refrain.

Koyala realized her defeat. As suddenly as she had appeared she whisked out of sight. When the hubbub finally died down the assembled chieftains looked expectantly toward Wobanguli.

"As ye will," he announced gravely. "Gather your followers, that we may pull the leopard down from his height."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before a weird death song rose from outside the walls. The song was sung by a woman, and she was counting those who should die before another morn:

*"Satu, dua, delapan,  
Tiga, empat, sembilan,  
Lima, tujuh, anam,  
Sapuluh!"*

Malay numerals as follows:

One, two, eight,  
Three, four, nine,  
Five, seven, six,  
Ten!

"Ten shall die," the Malays whispered among themselves. "Ten shall die before morn."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE ATTACK

**A**LTHOUGH it was nearly dawn before he sought his cot, Peter Gross was up less than two hours after sunrise on the morning following his return to the fort. Hastily dressing he stepped outside.

His eyes ran around the enclosure with a glance of approval. There was an air of alertness and of readiness for any eventuality about the place that pleased him. Lieutenant Van Voort, who held the rank of major in the colonials, was drilling his battalion of Javanese outside the walls. The smart appearance of the white-cotton clad troops was a source of keen satisfaction to the resident. The garrison was evidently in the best of spirits.

Peter Gross noticed a gun crew oiling and polishing one of the three field pieces that were the darlings of Captain Carver's heart. Sergeant McCarthy, one of the original twenty-five who had accompanied them to Bungan two years before, was in charge. Peter Gross complimented him on the appearance of his weapon.

"She's a beauty, sor," McCarthy declared with pride. Lowering his voice he inquired anxiously: "They'll not be disappointing us to-day, will they, sor?"

"Would you be disappointed if the Dyaks decided to let us alone?" Peter Gross asked with a smile.

"Faith, sor, 'twould break the byes' hearts," McCarthy declared earnestly.

"We'll rely on you when the pinch comes, sergeant," Peter Gross declared.

"I'll be there!" McCarthy replied, a flush of pleasure ruddying his tanned features.



The resident continued his inspection, well aware that Sergeant McCarthy would perform herculean feats if required on that day. He was a rare leader of men, this Peter Gross.

Grace met him in front of Lieutenant Van Voort's quarters. She was playing with the lieutenant's blue-eyed, flaxen-haired son, a rollicking youngster six years of age. Mrs. Van Voort observed their animated greeting with a shrewd smile.

"Captain Carver told us of your safe return early this morning," Grace said. "He informed us that you were under orders to sleep all day. Isn't there some dreadful penalty when one fails to obey the commands of the military?"

"If there is, I am afraid that you will be subject to court martial as well as I," Peter Gross retorted.

Grace laughed. "Tell me," she directed, "must we stay inside the walls all day? Mrs. Van Voort has forbidden me, under penalty, from stirring outside these rooms."

"Under penalty of doing our cooking," Mrs. Van Voort explained. "Do you know, *mynheer*, our servants have vanished, and we two women have been thrown wholly upon our own resources?"

"But I've already discovered that Mrs. Van Voort bakes perfectly wonderful Dutch cakes and cookies," Grace said. "So I'm not afraid of starving. I attended cooking school once, but my biscuits were as soggy as the swamp we tramped through yesterday, and my pies were burned black. All honor to the chef, say I."

"I believe I smell something burning now," Mrs. Van Voort exclaimed. She bustled hurriedly to the kitchen.

There was not the faintest odor in the air. Her object in leaving was perfectly obvious to the two young people she left behind. Grace chortled inwardly. Peter Gross colored with embarrassment. Somehow meeting this girl under conditions of civilization was more difficult than roaming with her through the jungle.

Grace saw his perturbation and guessed the reason. An impish spirit seized her, and she resolved that he must speak first. So she remained demurely silent, playing him with the battery of her eyes, and exulting in her power over this remarkable young giant who overawed a mob of savages by sheer force of personality, but shivered at the quiver of a girl's eyelash.

"I am sorry that we cannot permit you to roam about to-day," Peter Gross began diffidently. "But I do not feel that it would be safe." Realizing that this admission might provoke unnecessary alarm he hastened to add in a more hopeful tone: "Of course, the storm may blow over. I hope it will."

"The Javanese are drilling outside," Grace pointed out.

"That is their soldiers' duty," Peter Gross replied.

The remark was unfortunate. Grace was an ardent advocate of the equality of the sexes.

"You mean to say that I shall be required to skulk behind walls because I am a woman," she accused. "I hold, Mr. Gross, that women are entitled to share the same privileges and therefore the same dangers as men."

Her spirited reply made Peter Gross's nerves tingle. This was a woman of his race speaking, undaunted and unafraid. But his stern brow and sterner voice betrayed none of the warm admiration that filled him.

"I am sorry," he replied regretfully, "but the regulations permit no exceptions."

"Would they apply to Koyala if she were here?" Grace demanded.

"Her case is a trifle different—" Peter Gross began.

"Would she be in any less danger than I?"

"Possibly not, but as a priestess of the Dyaks she could come and go as she wished."

"And as an American girl, not a member of your official family, I am entitled to the same privileges," Grace asserted.

"I'm sorry I must refuse you," Peter Gross replied in a low tone that carried a note of keen distress. Grace

glanced at him curiously. She perceived that her show of indignation, more than half banter, was accepted by him in utmost seriousness. He was suffering because he must deny her request. A thrill of exultation passed through her. She knew she had no right to entertain such a feeling, but it was sweet, nevertheless, to be able to sway a man who was so strong, so splendidly virile, such a giant among men, yet so much an unspoiled boy. At the same time she was glad that he had not yielded.

"What a man!" she said to herself.

"I don't think I'll care to go out to-day," she remarked, smiling. "But if there should be an attack, you'll let me help nurse the wounded, won't you?"

"Gladly," Peter Gross replied warmly, relieved to escape from his dilemma.

"Is there any real danger?" Grace inquired.

"None," he equivocated gallantly. "I am confident that we shall beat them off without trouble."

"And when that is done, will they go back to their homes or must we stand siege?"

"The Dyack has little stomach for a siege," Peter Gross declared. "If we administer one sharp defeat, they will scatter, I am sure."

A wistful note crept into her voice.

"Do you think you will be able to do anything then for Mrs. Coston and Mr. Brady and the others?" she asked.

"I hope so," Peter Gross replied gravely.

"I know they are being held for ransom," Grace remarked. "And I recall what you said in regard to the treatment they would receive. But something might happen. Oh, Mr. Gross, I cannot help thinking of the peril they are in and the suffering they may undergo."

"You may be sure that we shall do all that men can do," he assured.

A shot shattered the stillness. They looked at each other questioningly. The Javanese began pouring through the gate on the double-quick.

"You'll pardon me?" Peter Gross asked in a voice devoid of excitement.

"Go, and God be with you," Grace breathed.

The shot heard by Peter Gross and Grace Coston was the precursor of an outburst of firing from three sides of the fort. The flank exposed to the sea was free from attack, for the Dyaks had too wholesome a respect for Carver's field pieces to venture on the water within their range.

The ground about the fort for a space of about two hundred feet was clear of all obstructions. Even the shade trees which had been left to grow during preceding less rigorous régimes, had been cut away since Carver's coming. The fiery sun had scarred and fissured the heavy black loam, splitting it into flakes that crumbled to dust under foot. The view from the walls was not a prepossessing one; an artist would have turned away in disgust; but the barren *plein* was absolutely devoid of cover for the enemy, and this was exactly what the thoroughly practical commandant had set out to accomplish.

Beyond the broad band of verdureless slope, the creeping jungle lay, jealously walling in the little islet of civilization that had risen in its virgin midst. The palms came first, silent sentinels on picket duty, rising among the copses of low shrub mingled with nipah and clumps of grass. Back of them the taller deciduous trees reared their stately heads while in the dank shade of their spreading branches moss and creeper and tree-fern flourished.

In the rear of the fort was a gooseberry plantation which an industrious Dyak had developed to a rare state of perfection. He found a ready market for his product among the members of the garrison and the little "Amsterdam" colony of merchants along the road to Bulungan town. The rows of berries ran parallel to the stockade and thus afforded a measure of cover to the bolder warriors indulging in the pleasant pastime of sniping.

Bullets were whining overhead when Peter Gross darted out and made for the spot where Captain Carver was coolly sweeping the forest with his glasses.

"We need you too badly to let you take chances, captain," the resident remonstrated smilingly to his commandant.

"Considering the accuracy of fire, I don't know but what I'm as safe here as behind cover," Carver replied. "I've been trying to get a line on how much in earnest these devils are."

"As usual, they're firing high," Peter Gross acknowledged cheerfully. "It's fortunate that the Dyak cannot shoot. He is a great deal more deadly when he sticks to his own weapons."

"You don't think the Malays are mixed up in this, then?" Carver asked.

"The Malay is generally a fair shot," Peter Gross observed non-committally. "He doesn't fire from the hip like a Dyak."

"They do shoot better—ah!" The exclamation was caused by a rifle-ball that passed through Captain Carver's coatsleeve. A triumphant yell from the jungle proclaimed that the enemy had observed the improvement in his marksmanship.

"That was a Mauser ball!" Carver exclaimed. "They must have better weapons than I thought they had."

"It was probably a Malay that fired that shot," Peter Gross observed. "I recognized the Malay yell."

"Wobanguli had the riffraff from pretty nearly the whole of the East Indies with him at pasar," Carver declared. "It's hard to tell who are our foes."

"After dusk?"

"Aye. They'll stick to cover pretty closely until nightfall. The Dyak has the weakness of every bush-bred savage; he's afraid to risk his precious hide in the open."

Peter Gross's prediction that the attackers would keep a respectful distance from the fort during the day was borne out. The Dyaks and their allies clung warily to the protecting cover of the jungle and the rhododendron hedges, exercising the most scrupulous care not to reveal their whereabouts. Bullets whistled intermittently over the fort and every defender who ex-

posed himself was made the target of a score of rifles. It was rarely, however, that those within had even a glimpse of their dusky foes crawling through the sedges and swinging from bough to bough.

Fortunately the Dyaks did not improve their shooting. Thus, although a considerable poundage of lead swept over the fort or flattened against the walls, little actual damage was done. When Captain Carver took toll late in the afternoon of his casualties he found them limited to three wounded. A Javanese, while conversing with a comrade on the walls, received a chance bullet that entered his mouth, knocked out two teeth, and cut a gaping wound in the left cheek. The poor fellow contemplated his misfortune stoically, for disfigurement is deemed a calamity among his people, and merely nodded his head when Captain Carver assured him that the government would give him a rich bounty for his wound. Another colonial received a bullet in his shoulder. The surgeon extracted it, an ugly piece of hammered lead, indicating that the foe was using ancient weapons as well as those of more modern make. One of Peter Gross's adventurers, Bright by name, had a flesh wound in the left forearm.

Grace volunteered for nursing service immediately after the fighting began, and her offer was gratefully accepted by the surgeon, who realized that fighting men could ill be spared. Her presence in the hospital enabled him to spend most of his time on the walls assisting in the defense. Although she was a novice at nursing she had aptitude and willingness, and her gentle ministrations won doglike glances of devotion from the dark-skinned islanders. Bright had scornfully refused to go below and had his wound dressed at his post of duty.

The jungle-crowned western heavens were aflame with streamers of scarlet and orange, gorgeous as a Venetian argosy returning to port in the days of the doges, when there was a sudden lull in the firing. Both Peter Gross and Captain Carver hurried to the wall, wondering what it might portend.

A mysterious silence, like that of tropic noontide, when a zenith sun, riding majestic in the heavens, pours the torrents of its flaming wrath on a shriveling earth and all animate creation slinks under shelter lest swollen veins burst in plenitude of blood, lay upon the brooding forest. The drooping palms, faint and weary from the excess of heat, had not yet begun to revive under the quickening impulses of the moist evening sea-breezes. The roses were hiding the deep carmine of their breasts from the unblushing look of the creatures of night. The humming refrain of the busy crickets died to a whisper. Gossamer threads of moss hung still and lifeless from the mangrove branches. The violence of man seemed strangely remote from the sylvan peace that lay before the watchers on the walls.

"What does it mean?" Captain Carver asked in a low voice, as though fearful of disturbing the silence.

"I don't know," Peter Gross replied subduedly. "I can't believe they have given up the siege. It is more likely that they are preparing for an attack."

"It will be dark in a half-hour," Carver observed.

"The moon rises in two hours. It promises to be a clear night."

"Do you think they will attack before then?"

"I doubt it. It would be contrary to Dyak practice."

"Ah Sing may have come."

"I doubt it. No proa has entered the harbor. I do not expect him until to-morrow."

"Then we won't have an attack to-night?"

"I don't know," Peter Gross replied. "This silence is puzzling. It may be that Wobanguli is endeavoring to create the impression that he has given up the fight. If that is true, he means mischief, and we may expect developments before morning. After the moon sets, in all probability, or earlier if the sky should cloud. I would not be surprised if he should attempt to take the fort before Ah Sing arrives in order to set himself right with the Chinaman for his failure to make a *coup d'état* at the pasar."

"H-m!" Carver gripped his chin thoughtfully. "I

believe you're right," he agreed. "It would be what I should expect from one of his mental processes."

The forest was calm during the first half of the night, ominously calm. Many of the familiar sounds of night were absent. Those on the walls missed the mild and plaintive calls of the cuckoo and noticed the uneasy twitterings of the lorikeets and other song-birds. A sharp watch was kept and lights were flashed at irregular intervals on the somber jungle wall. But the Dyaks kept well hidden.

When the moon rose it cast a mild radiance over the walls of the fort and the ghostly white houses beyond. It was such a light as imagination peoples with shadows. Lieutenant Van Voort, on suggestion of his superior, purposely placed his coolest heads on sentry duty, but despite this precaution the night was one of constant false alarms.

The moon sank to rest about the third hour after midnight, and the brilliant tropic sky which had looked down on Fort Wilhelmina earlier in the evening became partially obscured by flitting clouds. Not long thereafter a sentry on the rear wall saw the figure of a man silhouetted for a moment against the horizon in a break in the jungle wall. He withheld his fire because of the strict injunction against shooting at shadows and waited to confirm his judgment. A moment later his doubts were confirmed by the appearance of another crouching figure that cautiously rose and squatted back to earth again. Someone had evidently stepped over a row of gooseberry bushes in the plantation beyond and thus exposed himself.

"Here they come!" was the word silently passed along the line. The alarm was given quietly to those within, and the troops, discarding their blankets, took their assigned places without making an unnecessary sound. Dessa trained, the Javanese could move with almost as great stealth as their foes, and Carver's twenty-five had been too long in the jungle not to acquire some of the characteristics of its inhabitants.

There was a slight rustle like the faint stirring of a



breeze in a pine forest in the field ahead. Although hardly perceptible, it was significant to the trained ears that heard it along the walls.

"*Zij komen* (they come), *kapitein*," Lili Laki, a Javanese scout, whispered to Captain Carver.

The commandant strained his eyes to see. But the night was too dark. The earth was swathed in sable, and if men crawled like ants over its black bosom it gave no sign.

Minutes passed. The anxious watchers on the walls experienced an eery feeling as they gazed steadily with unseeing eyes into the formless void ahead, which they knew was steadily filling up with foes armed with rifle and sumpitan, and bloody kris sheathed in palm-leaf till the charge was sounded.

The strictest silence had been enjoined upon all, although the instruction was wholly unnecessary. The soldiers hardly breathed. Hands clenched to their rifle barrels they stared into the blackness ahead, waiting for the shaft of light that was to expose and, at the same time, blind and disconcert their foes.

The scout next to Carver, reputed to be the best in the service and possessing the keenest eyes, suddenly stiffened.

"They are here, *kapitein*," he announced in a sibilant hiss.

Carver gave the signal. The search-light blazed suddenly and without warning. Sweeping in a huge arc from west to south it disclosed the front rank of Dyaks on hands and knees within twenty yards of the fort. The field back of them was covered with foes, thick as a swarm of locusts.

With a savage yell the Dyaks leaped to their feet and charged forward. The yell was drowned in a deafening crash as the rifles of those on the wall spit flame. Lights flashed from one end of the fort to the other, throwing the entire *plein* in bold relief. The quick-firers got in their work and mowed down the savage horde.

The attack was practically over a moment after it

began. The semi-nude savages, accustomed only to jungle fighting and to attacks of helpless and undermanned merchant ships, could no more stand before the pitiless fire poured on them than a Dakota wheat field can face a northwest gale of hail and sleet. Those in the front ranks crumpled and fell, shrieking their death-agony to the night. Those behind them who escaped unscathed rose like a flock of crows at the approach of the hunter and scattered at top speed for the protecting cover of the tree-growth. Within three minutes after the first shot there was not a foe to be seen.

There was not a single casualty in the fort. In fact the Dyaks, who had hoped to surprise and overwhelm the defenders before the latter could get into action, had been too utterly surprised themselves to attempt any reply to the crushing fire directed upon them. Strangely enough, it was left to those who went out to perform an act of mercy to suffer the only loss.

When all resistance had ceased and the forest gloom had received its savage off-spring again, Captain Carver detailed a squad of Javanese to bring in the wounded. They had scarcely left the gates when a vengeful rifle spoke from the jungle, and one of them fell with a bullet through his breast. A score of rifles from the fort immediately answered the flash, but whether any of the shots found their mark the defenders did not learn. Captain Carver promptly called back the Javanese and left the Dyaks to gather their own wounded.

When dawn came the defenders were astonished to see that the field was quite clear. Dyak cunning and stealth had carried away the injured under the eyes of the watchful sentries.

It was a sanguinary dawn. The sun rose blood-red, dyeing the heaving billows a deep carmine. War's scarlet banners flaunted in the eastern horizon, portent of strife and woe. To the weary watchers on the walls the morn seemed almost an omen. "What will the day bring?" was the question on every lip.

It was noticeable that many an eye gazed southerly

along the coast, but whether in search of the dreaded proa of Ah Sing or in search of their lone hope of rescue, the gunboat, Prins Lodewyk, was hard for Peter Gross to guess.

The jungle was silent. Its green shades kept their secret well. If Wobanguli and his horde lay hidden there awaiting a more auspicious moment for attack, the fact was hid from the defenders' eyes.

"We might as well turn in," Peter Gross remarked to Captain Carver. "I don't anticipate another attack for some time."

"We can rest until Ah Sing arrives," Carver smiled. "We probably won't get much sleep after that."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE GOVERNOR ARRIVES

**I**T was shortly after the noon hour when an orderly came to Peter Gross's room with the electrifying message:

"There's a ship low down on the horizon coming this way, sir, at top speed. Lili Laki says he hears the sound of guns."

Peter Gross tumbled out and dressed hastily. Speeding to the ramparts he found Captain Carver and Paddy Rouse there ahead of him. Paddy was intently studying a distant speck on the horizon through binoculars.

"What do you make of it?" Peter Gross asked.

"Paddy says it's a yacht," Carver replied. "My eyes are not so good as they once were. There's another ship chasing her."

"What flag does she fly?"

"None that I can make out," Paddy announced.

"That's odd. What flag does the other ship fly?"

"She's too far distant to tell anything about her."

"Is it true that firing's been heard?"

"The first ship's being shelled by the second," Paddy stated. "There," he exclaimed, "a shell landed near her just then!"

"That devil, Ah Sing, is chasing her!" Peter Gross exclaimed. "Has she the speed to hold her own?"

"She seems to be gaining, if anything," Paddy reported.

"Signal her to keep out of this harbor, captain," Peter Gross directed, "otherwise she'll be trapped. Watch her close, Paddy, and let me know if she runs any closer inshore."

Carver issued the necessary instructions. A few mo-

ments later a string of pennants ran up the post-staff. The resident and commandant watched the race between the two vessels intently.

"It seems to me that the ship ahead is gaining just a trifle," Peter Gross observed. "The shells seem to be falling short."

The sound of the firing was quite audible, and the troops who were off duty clustered along the seaward wall. In the distance the heads of the Dyaks rose from the brush to witness the duel.

"Can you make anything more of the rear ship?" Peter Gross asked Paddy.

"I'm trying to, sir, but she's got me puzzled," the youth replied, focusing his binoculars steadily on the vessel. "She's a dead-ringer for the Prins Lodewyk."

"Let me have those glasses," Peter Gross demanded eagerly. He scrutinized the approaching vessels sharply for several moments. Then he lowered the glasses with the exclamation:

"It is the Prins. The yacht must be the pirate. That's why she flies no flag."

A breathless orderly ran up at this moment with additional binoculars. Captain Carver and Paddy each turned them on the approaching vessels.

"The yacht's edging off shore!" Paddy exclaimed.

"Ah, she sees her danger," Peter Gross replied bitterly. "She has the speed too—she's outrunning the Prins."

"The Prins is on the outside," Paddy observed hopefully. "She may pinch her at the cape."

"That's twenty miles north," Peter Gross pointed out regretfully. "The yacht has at least two knots the best of it; nearer three, I should judge. The Prins has no chance of overhauling her. She's wasting ammunition."

This was obvious. The shells of the pursuers were falling short and each minute increased the gap. The yacht was abreast of the fort when the gunboat ceased firing and began to reduce speed. The volume of smoke pouring from her funnel testified to the strain her engines had been under.

The next moment cleared away all doubt of the identity of pursuer and pursued—for the pirate insolently hoisted the black flag and romped away triumphantly under full head of steam from the doughty little gunboat sailing under the tricolor of the Netherlands.

"Drat the luck!" Paddy exclaimed fervently. Although neither Peter Gross nor Captain Carver said anything, their sternly compressed lips revealed the bitterness of their disappointment.

As the pirate fled northward into the far reaches of the rolling Celebes Sea the little gunboat slowly picked its way through the reefs off the entrance to the bay and steamed into the harbor. It did not claim the full attention of those on the ramparts, however, for Bussungun town below was suddenly galvanized into activity. Seemingly the entire population poured out of its huts and fled across the flats to the jungle. Men, women, and children joined in the mad rush, horsemen plunged through without regard to those on foot, palanquin bearers left their shrieking passengers and bolted at top-speed. Women struggled through the soggy marshes with little children clinging to one hand while the other held babes to their breasts. Peasants lumbered across the fields in their *grobaks*, wildly beating their stubborn oxen, and rumbly dos-à-dos careened wildly as they leaped the ditches.

Many of the fleeing Dyaks tried to save some of their effects. Shopkeepers were laden with their wares, householders were burdened with bundles of clothing, kerosene lamps, and other portables. One lanky Dyak raced along with a pet mias on his shoulders, the orang retaining its seat by clinging tightly to its master's woolly pate. Another—evidently no Moslem—had a pig in his arms.

Peter Gross looked for the figure of Wobanguli, always conspicuous because of his size, but saw nothing of the wily chieftain. The raja had evidently been in the bush with his troops.

That the general exodus did not pass unobserved on

board the Prins soon became apparent. Kapitein Enckel, commander of the gunboat, unlike some of his countrymen, was a man of shrewd wit and quick decision. It did not take him long to put two and two together. When he saw the Dyaks fleeing in post-haste he quickly concluded that they had reason to fear his coming. Without wasting time in investigation, he seized his opportunity of impressing a lesson on the crown's fickle subjects by dropping shells into the town. As the bursting shells fell among the bamboo dwellings and toppled them right and left the Dyak flight became a panic-stricken rout. Those who were trying to save part of their possessions threw everything aside in a frantic effort to distance their neighbors in the rush for the protecting screen of jungle.

"Conscience doth make cowards of us all," Peter Gross quoted to Captain Carver. "If those poor devils had stayed at home no harm would have come to them. Now they have officially become rebels, whom we must punish before we can permit them to return to their dwellings. Look there!"

The exclamation was induced by a burst of flame in the northwest corner of the town. The fire came from a dwelling knocked over by a shell. A long row of thatched houses stretched westward from it between two canals, and the easterly monsoon, fanning the flames, swept them through the bone-dry bamboo and thatch. This portion of the city was almost instantly a roaring furnace. Within a comparatively few minutes the entire section was doomed.

"Judgment!" Captain Carver pronounced. "It's the one lesson they understand."

The appearance of the Prins Lodewyk in Bulungan harbor was customarily an occasion for much saluting and dipping of colors at the fort. It is safe to say, however, that the little gunboat and her crew never before received such an ovation as they were tendered at this time. Long before the Prins had cleared the outer reefs the exchange of salutes began. As the vessel neared the fort the cheering broke out. Every-

one at the post was on the ramparts to extend welcome to their rescuers. The ships below joined in the fanfare, the stolid British and the phlegmatic Chinese giving cheer for cheer. As for the master of the Dutch trader, it was a marvel that he did not burst a blood-vessel.

Peter Gross and Captain Carver focused their glasses on the bridge of the *Prins* as she negotiated the reefs and made for her customary anchorage below the fort. It was Peter Gross who first recognized the figures grouped around Kapitein Enckel.

"By the holy bull of Bashan," he exclaimed, "there's Sachsen, my old friend Sachsen, standing next to the *kapitein*. There's someone with them who looks familiar—no, it can't be—by the gods it is, I'd know that strut anywhere!"

"Who?" Paddy cried, unable to restrain his curiosity in the excitement.

"His Excellency, the *Gouverneur-Generaal!*"

"Van Schouten?"

"The Jonkheer Adriaan Adriaanszoon Van Schouten himself! He's come, as he swore he would, though they all advised against it!"

"Hip, hip hooray!" Paddy yelled, leaping up and waving his hat.

"I feel like a schoolboy myself," Captain Carver remarked in a low voice, "to think of it—the governor-general here!"

"He's a rare good man," Peter Gross murmured fondly. "He stands by his friends through thick and thin." There was a bit of moisture in his eyes.

The *Prins Lodewyk* had hardly swung into anchorage before a boat left her side. By the time it reached shore there was a detachment from the fort on the beach to meet it. The first man to step out after the boat was beached was the governor. Although past fifty, he leaped out as lightly as a youth half his years, stiffened his back militarily, and smiled upward into the warmly welcoming face of Peter Gross.

The difference in station between these two, gov-



ernor-general and resident, nobleman and commoner, was forgotten. Their hands clasped warmly.

Two sailors stepped forward to assist the aged Sachsen, the governor's adviser and Peter Gross's dearest friend, to step out of the boat. Leaping forward, Peter Gross thrust them aside and gathered the old man in his arms, lifting him over the side and placing him gently on the sands.

"Sachsen!" was all he said in a voice that broke huskily.

"*Pieter, mijne kindeken* (Peter, my little child)," the old man responded hoarsely.

Carver was introduced. The governor-general ran an appreciative eye over the trim figure of the commandant and the file of soldiers lined up on both sides of the lane to receive him.

"I see they have not smoked you out," the governor observed.

"Your excellency notes that our flag is still flying," Carver replied courteously.

"Have you had much fighting?"

"An assault last night, your excellency. Nothing serious."

Van Schouten glanced swiftly and shrewdly at the commandant.

"I wonder what your definition of a serious attack is, *kapitein*," he remarked. "Let us see what manner of *bijenkorf* (beehive) you have built here."

They marched up the steep stile, the governor spry as a chick. He walked with a peculiar gait that was not unlike the stiff but springy stride of a cockerel. Carver recalled the name whereby he was known the length and breadth of the Dutch possession—"De Kemphaan (the Gamecock)."

"He's well named in more respects than one," was his silent reflection.

Peter Gross assisted Sachsen, for the old man's eighty-odd years were beginning to tell on him, and his breath came rapidly as they struggled up the steep ascent.

"Let me help you into a palanquin, father," Peter Gross pleaded when they were midway up the slope. Sachsen's face lighted with pleasure at the salutation. Being childless, he fostered the thought that Peter Gross, the homeless waif whom he had befriended years before, was his son. But he refused the offer of a palanquin.

"I am stronger than you think, *Vrind Pieter*," he rejoined fondly. "With your good right arm to lean upon I shall reach the top without mishap. You would not shame me before the fair ladies I see above by bringing me in like a babe in arms, would you?" he asked with a twinkle.

"They are Mrs. Van Voort, the lieutenant's wife, and the Jonge Juffrouw Coston, an American girl," Peter Gross hastened to explain.

Sachsen's mild blue eyes rested questioningly upon Peter Gross's gray ones.

"The *jonge juffrouw* is a new addition to your colony?" he inquired artlessly. "I do not recollect her name from your letters."

"She escaped with me from the Zuyder Zee," Peter Gross explained. "But possibly the fate of this ship is news to you."

"We were told about it at Coti," Sachsen replied gravely. "A coasting proa brought in the report and the city was in a turmoil. There was talk of rebellion, but our coming stopped that. How did you escape, *Vrind Pieter*?"

"The *jonge juffrouw* and I jumped overboard when I saw there was no chance for escape otherwise," Peter Gross replied. "We swam ashore and made our way overland the following morning to the *Kjai Naiok's* house. From there we went by *tambangan* to *Bulungan*, arriving here night before last."

"Jawel!" Sachsen replied non-committally. "You truly had a most marvelous escape—and the *jonge juffrouw* also. You knew her before?"

Their eyes met. Peter Gross read only friendly curiosity in Sachsen's glance. Eighty years of life had

taught the old man to mask his interest behind a smile of benignity and to speak of things that affected him him most deeply in a casual way.

Peter Gross smiled. "She was a total stranger to me," he said. "We introduced ourselves on Bornean soil, by the pale light of a tallow lamp, each of us drenched to the skin, and the water from our dripping garments making little puddles all around us."

Their conversation was necessarily interrupted by their arrival at the top of the hill and the gates of the fort. There was a wild fanfare of trumpets and a booming of guns as the governor and his escort of natty sailors and swart colonials marched in.

His Excellency, De Jonkheer Adriaan Adriaanszoon Van Schouten, was thoroughly in his element and strutted like a Roman conqueror back from the wars. His features maintained their habitual sternness and severity, for the *gouverneur-generaal* was as punctilious of his dignity as a maiden lady of her reputation, but his stiffly starched back and the triumphant gleam in his eyes were eloquent testimony of his elation.

The governor-general's quick eye caught the presence of femininity in the group. Mrs. Van Voort he knew and dismissed with a glance and polite genuflection, for she had been one of the army circle while her husband was stationed at Batavia. Grace Coston's fresh young face, her ruddy cheeks, flushed with the excitement of the moment, and her wavy brown hair caught and held his attention, however. He beckoned to Peter Gross.

"You have ladies here, I see," he remarked. "Is Captain Carver the fortunate benedict, or have you committed the unpardonable crime of matrimony without consulting me?"

"Neither surmise is true, your Excellency," Peter Gross replied with a smile. "The lady is Miss Coston, one of my countrywomen who was rescued with me from the Zuyder Zee."

"One who *was* your countrywoman," the irascible Van Schouten snapped. "*Pot ver dikkie, mynheer, we*

will make you a Hollander yet for all that Yankee blood in you."

"I have striven to be a good servant to the state," Peter Gross replied formally.

"*Donder en blikse*, who wants to talk about that when there is so fair a maid waiting to have speech with me?" the governor-general barked. "She has been looking in this direction ever since I entered the gate. Come, introduce me!"

No Spanish *hidalgo* in the palmiest days of Aragon's famous court ever carried himself with more grace than did the little governor when he approached Grace Coston. He bowed his courtliest as Peter Gross performed the ceremony of introduction.

"*Jonge juffrouw*, it is a pleasure to come to *Bu-lungan* to visit my brave and loyal resident, *Mynheer Gross*," the governor assured in response to Grace's few well-chosen words of welcome and joy at the *Prins's* opportune arrival. "It is twice a pleasure," he added with a twinkle, "to find *Mynheer Gross* in need of assistance, for, I assure you, *juffrouw*, that a mere cocksure and self-sufficient youth never came to *Insulinde*. But it is thrice a pleasure to find here, in this arid waste, such beauty as it has been my good fortune to set eyes upon to-day."

"You did not know *Mrs. Van Voort* was here?" Grace asked demurely, her eyes twinkling with merriment.

The governor did not even blink at this shot.

"*Orchids*," he responded gallantly, "grow best in concealed spots. That is why *Mrs. Van Voort* grows more beautiful every day, while we in *Batavia* regret her absence."

The dimpled little lady, who was mother of the lieutenant's robust son, blushed at this praise from the governor, and was happier for a moment than she had been during the entire two years of her enforced exile.

Grace had taken stock of the governor's peculiarities, his irascibility that hid a gentle and kindly spirit, his pomposity that could not offend but could only amuse,

his truculence that was but a mask for a soul too impulsively generous. His pompous manner was a challenge to her democratic instincts. She had all the iconoclasm of youth and could not resist the temptation to prick this bubble of conceit. Their verbal exchange was vivid and rapid for a few moments, while poor Mrs. Van Voort paled and listened with quaking heart. Peter Gross finally intervened by introducing Sachsen.

"Mynheer Gross has told me how you came here, my daughter," the old man remarked gently. "I hope we will know each other better ere long."

Something in his tone, or mayhap in his voice, caused Grace to catch her breath for an instant and flash a glance at Peter Gross, who stood serenely by, smiling pleasure, and unconscious of any significance in his patron's words. Some of the color flowed from her cheeks.

"I surely hope our acquaintance may improve during the few days we shall spend here together," she replied, meeting his glance candidly.

As Sachsen dropped her hand he stole a glance at his *protégé*. But Peter Gross, he saw, had eyes only for the girl. Sachsen stroked his gray beard thoughtfully.

"Youth!" he murmured under his breath. "Youth!"

## CHAPTER XX

### THE GOVERNOR MEETS KOYALA

THE soft radiance of a mild moonlight flooded Fort Wilhelmina on the evening of the day the governor-general arrived. The moon was long in the eastern sky and threw the long silhouettes of the walls far into the interior of the enclosure. While making a round of inspection Peter Gross stumbled upon a dim form hidden in a niche between two projecting buttresses. Stepping forward suspiciously, he uttered a sharp challenge.

"It is only I," came the plaintive response in a woman's voice that he instantly recognized.

"Miss Coston!" he exclaimed delightedly.

"I came here to watch the play of the moonlight on the still water of the bay," Grace stated. "It put me in mind of winter evenings I once spent in a little town in Florida. But I suppose this is '*verboten*.' Are you going to send me home?"

She asked the question with a provocative lilt in her tones that roused a dormant chord in Peter Gross.

"It's contrary to regulations for you to be here after sundown," he replied gravely. "But—"

"Yes?"

"I'm afraid that if I drove you away I'd punish myself worse than you."

Grace caught her breath. She had not expected such a reply—the Mynheer Gross she knew was a dreadfully serious chap who had no time for the pretty amenities of conversation between maids and men. An impish spirit seized her, her eyes danced with merriment. "Why shouldn't I?" she asked herself in

an undertone, as though debating a question. She flashed a sudden smile on him.

"You are becoming as complimentary as his excellency, *mynheer*," she announced demurely.

"Has his excellency been paying you compliments?" he inquired.

"Heaps and heaps," Grace declared. "He fairly rains them. I never knew the possibilities of the English language for compliments until I met him. And when he had exhausted his English he began in French."

"There is no finer or more gallant gentleman than his excellency, the *Jonkheer*," Peter Gross said warmly.

"But what a temper he has," Grace observed plaintively.

"Ah! You've discovered that already?"

"We've quarreled since the *siesta* hour," Grace replied. "That is why I ran away and came here. He has been to New York and thinks Americans savages. I told him what I thought of his smelly Amsterdam with its stagnant canals." She laughed merrily. "I am afraid I hurt his feelings terribly, but I'll credit him with retaining his politeness."

Peter Gross chuckled. "He is probably getting his revenge out of Captain Carver now," he remarked. "He discovered that the captain used the foils, and nothing would satisfy him but that they must have a bout. You know he is rated as one of the most accomplished swordsmen in all Europe? He has fairly been pining to clash rapiers with someone worthy of his steel ever since the colonial office sent him to Batavia. They say he invites every officer of rank who comes to Oost-Indië to a bout the moment the man steps ashore at Tanjong Priok. He'll find Carver no easy opponent, though. The captain is a pretty good man with the sword himself."

"He's a lovable old gentleman for all his peculiarities," Grace declared with conviction. "I'm going to have a perfectly happy time disagreeing with him."

"But don't make yourself guilty of *lese-majesty*," Peter Gross cautioned.

"Every American is born noble," Grace retorted. "One cannot be guilty of *lese-majesty* in speaking freely to one's peers, can one?"

"I doubt whether you could be convicted if you were guilty of every political crime in the calendar," Peter Gross evaded gallantly. They laughed like light-hearted children.

"Isn't a night like this wonderfully soothing?" Grace remarked after a pause. "I feel as though I could sit and dream in this deliciously mystic Oriental atmosphere forever. I never could understand the legend of the lotus-eaters when I was a girl, but I do now."

"The tropics have that effect," Peter Gross conceded. "Sometimes it's unfortunate. Many a good man has lost his ambition here and become a shiftless vagrant satisfied to eat and sleep."

The remark started a new train of thought for Grace. She gazed pensively at the water. "Will something be done to rescue those who were on the Zuyder Zee with us?" she asked presently.

"There are troops on the way now," Peter Gross said. "The larger part of a regiment. The pirates will be hunted on both sea and land. His excellency is in earnest and means to end these sporadic outbreaks of piracy for all time."

"Is he going to lead the army in person?" Grace asked.

Peter Gross hesitated. "I might as well acknowledge that he has left that to me," he said. "It will be common knowledge to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm so happy! I congratulate you, Mr. Gross." The spontaneous exclamation thrilled Peter Gross, and he pressed the hand she offered him warmly. She quickly withdrew it.

"I know you'll rescue those I love!" she said.

His ardor cooled. She was promised to another, and, strangely enough, the fact hurt.



"I shall do all that is humanly possible," he assured gravely.

"I know you will," she replied.

The conversation passed into less personal channels. They chatted gayly and the minutes flitted by unnoticed. Peter Gross leaned back in deep contentment, feeling that he was experiencing his happiest moment since he first stepped ashore at Bulungan. There was something infinitely calming, infinitely sweet, to sit thus in the dim light and exchange opinions with so charming a girl as this. She told him things that had happened in the country he had left behind, items of news that never strayed into the papers which came into his hands. She included bits of description that gave him a new conception of the marvelous growth and advance of his mother country and caused his heart to swell with pride. To her narrative she added a piquancy of wit that chased the dull lines of care from his face and made him laugh like a boy. It was not until a change of sentries took place that they awoke to a joint realization of the lateness of the hour.

"Mercy!" Grace exclaimed. "I had no idea we had talked so long. You shouldn't have permitted me," she added, turning on Peter Gross severely.

"We must hold these chats oftener," he declared with conviction. "You'll be tempting me to go back home."

"Where, after all, you belong," Grace flashed.

"No, my work is here," Peter Gross replied gravely.

They parted, Grace entering the Van Voort home while Peter Gross walked on to his quarters. A few moments later a figure detached itself from the shadows. It was Koyala, who had been admitted by a sentry and was going to headquarters when she chanced to see Peter Gross and Grace strolling in her direction. She thereby happened to hear their parting words.

The priestess's face was a ghastly gray in the wan moonlight. The fierce Dyak blood that was hers from her mother flooded it with hate and fury. Her fingers

clutched the thin garment that covered her breast and crushed it between them.

"The vampire!" she hissed. "She would steal him from Bulungan, would she? Him, who is all to us? And she is the promised bride of another?"

A fit of trembling seized her. Elemental rage and passion almost too much for her frail frame to bear, made her quiver like a palm tree bent by the typhoon's blast. Through her tightly compressed lips came bits of Dyak expression, and the word "wench" hissed three times. She choked and struggled to conceal a fit of coughing. Gliding behind a break in the wall she dropped to her knees and lifted supplicating hands above.

"*Hanu token, hanu token*, let not the white woman triumph," she prayed. "Save him for Bulungan. Give me guile, give me wisdom, *hanu token*, and thou, Djath, and thou, Taman Rikung, who are the guardian of the souls of the dead. Give me strength to control my passion, give me wisdom to direct my ways. Let me not fall into the error of former days when I sought to slay him to satisfy a foolish vengeance. O, Djath, befriend me, and thus, Chawatangi, smile down on thy daughter's daughter."

As stealthily as she had hidden herself she leaped into the path again and glided after Peter Gross. He was drawing out a chair in his room as she quietly opened the door and entered. He looked up at her sudden appearance, and then broke into a welcoming smile.

"Koyala!" he exclaimed. "I was just thinking of you and wondering where I could find you."

"Your servant is here," Koyala replied quietly.

A flash of annoyance crossed the resident's face. "Don't speak that way," he rebuked forcibly. "You are Koyala *Bintung Burung*, priestess of Bulungan, my peer in everything. Everything!" he repeated with emphasis. "If we meet on any basis it is that of friends who mutually appreciate each other."

"It shall be as you say," Koyala replied lifelessly.

Peter Gross thrust his chair back determinedly and stepped toward Koyala. She shrank back against the wall.

"Koyala," he asked, "what's wrong? Wherein have I offended? Something has come up between you and me. Since my return we have not been the friends we were before I set out for Batavia. What is the reason; be frank?"

"There is nothing," Koyala replied dully.

"Is it Miss Coston?" Peter Gross asked.

The smoldering light in the priestess's eyes blazed with a sudden fire that she hid from him by lowering her lashes.

"I have told you, and I say it again," Peter Gross asserted with emphasis, "Miss Coston is nothing to me except a friend, a very good friend. She is the promised bride of another, and him she shall marry if there is any way I can save him. That's my problem to-day, how to save him. That is why I was thinking of you. I need your help."

Peter Gross always strove zealously to guard himself against any chance phrase or expression that might injure Koyala's sensitive feelings. He knew how the taint of her birth rankled, how her tempestuous, highly sensitized soul writhed in anguish because of it. But he never knew how grievously he blundered and how cruelly he cut, in his naive confession that he only thought of her this night because he needed her help.

Koyala came on her mother's side from a race who deem it the greatest disgrace to show pain under torture. She therefore did not reveal by so much as a tremor how deeply the iron had bitten into her soul.

"It is to discuss that very matter that I came to see you, *mynheer*," she announced quietly. "I have been to the city that Ah Sing has built."

"The deuce you have!" Peter Gross exclaimed. "Where is it?"

"Not too fast, *mynheer*. What do you propose to do?"

Koyala tossed aside the dark cloak she was wearing

and revealed herself in her native dress, the pure white sarong and cabaya she wore to emphasize her purity as a virgin and her function as a priestess. She sank into a chair and regally nodded to Peter Gross to do the same. He meekly obeyed.

"I do not know what I am going to do," Peter Gross declared. "I felt that I must talk with you before I decided."

"Tell me first what has happened here," Koyala directed. "You were attacked. You beat them off. They waited for Ah Sing, but instead the war-ship came and shelled my people out of their homes. That is all I know."

She spoke bitterly, and Peter Gross scented the cause.

"The people were not shelled out of their homes," he corrected gently. "It is true that some of the houses were leveled with shells and fired after the people had fled. But that was because those on board the Prins saw them flee and suspected that some mischief was up. If they had stayed quietly in their homes, there would have been no trouble. But a guilty conscience sometimes speaks louder than judgment."

"My people erred," Koyala replied calmly. "It was inevitable that some should suffer. And, as always, the suffering fell on the innocent. But I did not come here to discuss that. What are you going to do—send an army against the Dyaks, or against Ah Sing?"

"His excellency, the *gouverneur-generaal*, has left it all to me," Peter Gross declared. "And now, Koyala, I ask you—what should I do?"

"We will leave the Batavian chanticleer out of this discussion," the priestess responded coldly. "I have never asked aught of him, nor will I. What I have done and will do is for Peter Gross, Resident of Bulungan."

"It is Peter Gross who asks you what he must do," the resident replied, with a conciliatory smile.

"Let me tell you first what I saw in the city of Ah Sing," Koyala replied.

Peter Gross waited in respectful silence. The Argus Pheasant veiled her eyes with lowered lids and crossed her hands in her lap.

"The city is on water, and cunningly hid," Koyala began. It was on the tip of Peter Gross's tongue to ask where, but he wisely refrained. "A proa might search many days and fail to find the opening of the channel that leads to it, but inside there is plenty of deep water. The approach from the land side is even more cunningly concealed. Ah Sing has three ships there—his own, a fast ship, the Zuyder Zee, and an American ship, the Natchez. The captured ships he will remodel and sell."

"The old fox!" Peter Gross muttered under his breath.

"All the prisoners are being kept aboard the Zuyder Zee. One of my people whom I can trust told me that there is much dissatisfaction among the chiefs because the promised ransom has not come. There has been some talk of throwing the men to the crocodiles and giving the women as wives to the datos. But Ah Sing has left word that they must be held until his return."

"Where is he?"

"On the sea. I was told he was *en route* to Bulungan."

"Then 'twas he the Prins chased," Peter Gross commented. Seeing Koyala's inquiring look he sketched the dramatic arrival of the gunboat.

"He has a very fast ship," Koyala assented. "It was built for him in a Japanese yard."

"H-m," Peter Gross hummed. He pondered thoughtfully and asked.

"Can you guide us to this city?"

"I can tell you the road."

Peter Gross turned to a filing cabinet and dug out a map of Bulungan which he spread on the table before them.

"Where is the place?" he asked.

Koyala's hands lay idly in her lap. "I said I could

tell you where it lies," she replied. "I did not say I would."

Peter Gross rose slowly. His stern glance held her eyes, but she did not waver.

"I do not understand, *juffrouw*," he said.

"It would seem, *mynheer*," she replied in tones as formal as his own, "that I possess something which you covet. In a barter there is customarily an exchange."

"You desire something, then?"

"I have two conditions—"

"Name them," Peter Gross interrupted forcibly without waiting for her to complete her sentence.

"The first is—immunity for my people."

"Have I ever failed in justice either to you, Koyala, or to your people?" Peter Gross asked.

"I ask more than justice," Koyala replied.

"Should I let the guilty go unpunished that they may do more evil?"

"My people are weak, they were led astray," she pleaded passionately. "They are yet in the days of their fathers; they have not come to understand the purpose of the *orang blanda*." Her chin lifted and a flood of blood rushed to her face. In a voice of pain she cried: "Have I not betrayed my people oft enough for you, *mynheer*, that you should ask me to do this again?"

At the sight of the girl's distress Peter Gross turned his face away. He perceived the light in which these negotiations appeared to her, and what they cost her. A sense of shame at his own ignoble participation filled him.

"Koyala," he replied earnestly, "so far as lies within my power I grant you what you ask. With one exception: the Raja Wobanguli must be shorn of his rajaship. So long as he rules there can be no peace. His craft is at the bottom of half our troubles. What my powers are, I do not know as yet. His excellency, the *gouverneur-general*, is here and has entrusted me with task of putting an end to this rebellion and piracy.

He has not yet defined how broad my powers will be in dealing with offenders."

"That strutting peacock, Van Schouten, here?" Koyala cried heatedly. "He who branded my name with shame and set a price upon my head? I will not deal with him! I go to my people!"

She sprang for the door, but Peter Gross was quicker than she. He stood against it.

"Mynheer Gross," she said in a low, hoarse voice, tense with emotion, "let me pass."

"Koyala," he replied, "you are dealing with me, the Resident of Bulungan. I do not ask you to speak one word to the governor. You need not even meet him. If his excellency does not see fit to give me *carte blanche* in rearranging the affairs of the residency after this rebellion is over, as he has given me power to stamp out the rebellion, you may go without hindrance to your people. In that event I will go back to my native country and Bulungan will know me no more."

Koyala's eyes searched his face with fierce hunger, as she half doubted, half believed. With a tiny flutter of breath she finally relaxed and stepped back.

"Will you wait here while I seek the favor of an interview with his excellency?" Peter Gross asked.

She nodded.

He stepped outside, leaving the door ajar to testify to his confidence in her. When he returned a few moments later he announced:

"His excellency will be here in a few moments. Do you wish to hear our interview?"

"I do not desire to see his face," Koyala replied coldly. "I will remain outside." She glided out. A few minutes later the governor entered. He was breathing heavily.

"*Ver dikke*, Mynheer Gross, why did you not tell me you had such a swordsman here as your Kapitein Carver?" he roared lustily. "I would have been here at Bulungan to visit you long ago had I known it. Twice he had me against the wall; me, who am esteemed

among the five best blades of Europe. I had all I could do to hold my own against him and then I beat him only by a little trick that is all mine own. *Verdamp!* but I feared for a time I had become an old man and lost my cunning."

The governor was evidently in the best of spirits, for he chafed his thin, wiry hands together with great gusto and satisfaction.

"Captain Carver had told me he was fond of fencing," Peter Gross replied. "I did not know he was so proficient."

"He tells me he was a member of a university team in the *Vereenigde Staten*," the governor declared. "*Donder en bliksem*, I thought you Yankees were too fond of clouting each other to cultivate that manliest of all arts, the art of fence."

"Your Excellency will find that there are few arts that we Americans have not embellished," Peter Gross responded loyally.

"Humph!" the governor snorted. "*Mynheer*, I had hoped by this time that the Dutch blood you have on your mother's side would have spoken. You must become one of us."

"Your Excellency, I shall never be a citizen of any other country than my own," Peter Gross replied.

The governor frowned. "You have a matter to discuss with me, *mynheer*?" he asked.

"Yes, your Excellency. I desire to know how broad my powers will be in dealing with this rebellion, both now and after the rebels have returned home."

Van Schouten cast a shrewd glance at his resident from beneath his eyebrows.

"Why do you ask, *mynheer*?" he demanded bluntly.

"Because I have just promised immunity to all the rebels except one," Peter Gross replied.

The governor's jaw tightened. He studied the resident coolly.

"Methinks you have assumed a large responsibility, *mynheer*," he suggested mildly.



"Therefore I ask your Excellency to confirm it," Peter Gross replied.

"Have these *duivelen* sent emissaries to treat for peace?"

"I spoke to-night to an unaccredited ambassador, but one to whose voice I know the Dyaks will listen."

"His name?" the governor snapped.

"The priestess Koyala."

"The *Bintang Burung*?" the governor cried. "That spawn of Jezebel here? By the God of Israel, *mynheer*, you try my patience sorely."

"I have pledged her, that so far as in my power lies the Dyaks, with the exception of the Raja Wobanguli, shall go free if they return to their homes and resist no more," Peter Gross replied coolly. "Wobanguli shall be shorn of his rank and reduced to the head of a *dessa*. I ask you to confirm those terms."

"Sodom and Gomorrah! Are you *gouverneur-generaal*, Mynheer Gross, or am I?" the governor bellowed, his sallow face purpling. "I have told you that we must teach these devils of *bruinevels* a lesson. I have told you that we must set an example that will cause every child of Ham in these islands to quake with fear. Now you offer them sweetmeats to cease pirating and murdering. Hell's fire, I will not have it!"

The governor was working himself into a grand passion. He strode fiercely up and down the room while Peter Gross waited impassively.

"This she-devil Koyala has come in here with her sweet words and honeyed phrases and stolen your reason," Van Schouten stormed. "She was sired by a French slaver and dammed by the witch daughter of a Dyak medicine doctor—"

"Governor!" Peter Gross thundered.

The door flew open. A vision of flaming wrath leaped inside and confronted the astonished Van Schouten.

"You who skulk behind stone walls and live on the sweat of starving millions," Koyala hissed in a voice strangled with fury, "you who kill here and reward

there and know the reason for neither, you to whom the request of the vilest trader leeching these islands is more than the just claim of our proudest chief, I come to tell you that you shall see a flame of revolt pass over your empire that shall obliterate the *orang blanda* from Singapore to Papua. White blood shall flow like water and none shall live to tell the tale. *Insulinde* shall return to her people, Asia shall be Asia's. Stone walls and fast ships will not save you, and poison or the knife will wipe out the stain you cast on me."

The governor stepped back a pace.

"Mynheer Gross, who is this woman?" he asked in a voice of dreadful calmness.

"It is the Juffrouw Koyala, your Excellency," the resident replied wearily. He seemed to have aged since Koyala's dramatic entrance.

A common thought animated Koyala and the governor at that moment. Both sprang for the door. The governor was first and held it fast. Koyala's dagger flashed on the instant.

"Let me pass," she demanded in a voice thrilling with passion, "or I will avenge thy insult myself."

The governor stood as if carved in marble. His fierce glance met and held hers as if in hypnotic trance. Twice Koyala's arm contracted as though to drive home the blade, and relaxed again. Meantime Peter Gross, moving quickly and silently as a panther, stole around the table and caught her wrist from behind.

Koyala lunged forward fiercely to break loose. But few men could tear themselves away from the resident's iron grip, and although Koyala fought with a strength that few other women could have equaled, she was helpless. She collapsed suddenly and burst into a torrent of tears.

The governor latched the door and cried, "*Juffrouw!*"

Koyala started as though struck with a whip.

"*Juffrouw,*" he continued meekly, "the Jonkheer Adriaan Adriaanszoon Van Schouten acknowledges

that he has erred. He has wronged you grievously. Therefore, as a nobleman of Holland, to a noblewoman of Borneo, he begs your forgiveness."

To the amazement of Peter Gross the fiery governor dropped to one knee before Koyala and inclined his head. He waited thus for her reply.

The room was silent as the sea in a calm. The only sound in it was the sound of breathing. Koyala's olive-tinted hand clutched the pure linen of her cabaya over her breast as she shrank away from the governor in the chair into which she had fallen. It was Peter Gross who first recovered.

"His Excellency admits he has wronged you, *juffrouw*," he pointed out quietly. "He begs your forgiveness."

Koyala's bosom fluttered tremulously. Her hands clenched and loosed alternately. The flaming scarlet of her face had become a brown-gray like the pallor of death when it comes to the children of the southland.

"I—cannot—forgive," she gasped. "Let me go!"

She slipped out of the chair and backed against the wall.

The governor rose. There was a fine expression of majesty in his thin, aristocratic face, with its sharply chiseled features. Admiration there was, too, admiration that showed in his eyes.

"Permit me to leave, *juffrouw*," he requested, bowing low in his most courtly manner. "Mynheer Gross will provide for you, I am sure. I have only this to say, that the Governor-General of Insulinde regrets that we have not met before. It would have saved us both much sorrow, and me much shame."

Turning to Peter Gross he announced:

"All that you have asked, *mynheer*, is yours. You may do as you see fit."

With another low bow he unlatched the door and stepped out.

Peter Gross walked forward, took Koyala by the arm, and led her to a chair. He seated himself opposite her.

"He has a heart as good as gold," he stated. "He has been ill-advised, but there is none so quick as he to make amends once he sees his error. You have made a true and lasting friend, Koyala."

"I hate him," she cried vehemently, her face flaming. "I hate him! Oh, the shame of it!" She hid her face in her hands.

"He called you '*juffrouw*' and 'noble-woman of Borneo,'" Peter Gross pointed out gently. "He is too candid and truthful a man to say other than he means. His temper is his weakness—sometimes I think you two have much in common, Koyala."

The priestess gazed with unseeing eyes at the wall. Her face was drawn and colorless. Peter Gross studied her profile, so marvelously perfect, and saddened again at the thought of her unhappy birth.

"You remember, *mynheer*, that I specified two conditions to our treaty?" Koyala asked suddenly, in a curiously strange voice.

"You did not specify the second," Peter Gross replied. "What is it?"

Koyala turned to face him. Her eyes were fixed steadfastly upon his. There was a curious hunger in them, Peter Gross thought, and he vaguely wondered.

"The condition is this," Koyala announced slowly, "that you remain here as Resident of Bulungan until a white man can paddle a *tambangan* from Bulungan to the temple of Hunya Kawa which is at the foothills of the Tohen Batu, without fear of Punao or Bukit, headhunter or thief."

A vision of Grace Coston, New York, home, flitted before Peter Gross. Until he spoke this night with Grace Coston he had not realized how ardently he desired these things. Koyala's words were as the flaming angel before the gates of paradise.

"Let me think," he replied huskily. "I cannot promise to-night."

## CHAPTER XXI

### SACHSEN COUNSELS HIS PROTÉGÉ

THAT the rebellion, so far as the immediate vicinity of the city of Bulungan was concerned, was broken, was evidenced the next morning. The sun had only risen a little way when a group of dejected natives walked timidly to the gates of the fort and requested admittance. They were carrying gifts of game, fowl, and jars of *agar-agar* as propitiatory offering. None were armed and when they were brought into the resident's presence they fell flat on their faces before him, protesting their loyalty.

"For the sake of the *Bintang Burung*, who pleaded for you last night, I have forgiven you," he said. "Bring in your sumpitans and krisses. Go to your homes and till your fields. Tell your people that those who come now will be forgiven. It will be otherwise with those who remain in the jungle."

The delighted Dyaks broke into extravagant cries of joy and praise, but the resident checked them.

"You will be judged by what you do from this hour on, not by what you have done," he declared. "I lay this burden upon you: Go to your people, to the men of all the tribes, Punan and Bukit, Tring and Long Wai, Dyaks of the sea and Dyaks of the hill, and tell them to send their *orang kayas* and village head men to me. The Malays must send their datoos. Those who come will be pardoned. Those who remain away shall feel the wrath of Peter Gross."

For the next three days the resident was kept busy meeting deputations of thoroughly cowed Dyaks, amazed at such unheard of clemency, but happy to take advantage of it. Peter Gross knew that some of

the wizened old chiefs who knew no law but that of eye for eye, and tooth for tooth, thought him a fool, but he made no effort to enlighten their curiosity. Most of the aborigines accepted his magnanimity with indifference. The ways of the *orang blanda* were and would always continue to be an inscrutable mystery to them.

Despite the many cares of administration, and the bustle of preparation for the transports, due to arrive any day, Peter Gross found opportunity to talk with Grace Coston. The American girl, cultured, clever, independent, but not bold, was a new type to him. The women of Batavia and the other ports of Insulinde whom he knew were not thus. They were frugal housewives, industrious, patient, and excellent mothers, but self-centered, heavy of wit, gossipy. In his brief contacts with society between voyages or when his ship stopped, the resident had established an acquaintanceship with many of them. He had found none, married or unmarried, whom he did not privately classify as a bit of a bore.

But this countrywoman of his was different. She had a habit of surprising one into saying things one had not intended to reveal. She entertained with nimble wit and humorous anecdote that was always free from malice. She had opinions, and held them tenaciously. She talked logically and with information, but she argued with spirit. But most of all Peter Gross admired her youthful enthusiasm and her fresh, vivid manner of visualizing and expressing her ideas.

For the first time in his life, therefore, the resident found himself hurrying through his official duties that he might have time for social diversion. Since these were busy days, every hour of leisure was carefully planned and jealously safeguarded. When, therefore, at sundown of the third day he found the irrepressible Van Schouten, cavalierly as a buck of twenty-five, had pre-empted his appointment and was assisting Miss Coston to admire the sunset, he returned to his quarters in decided ill-humor. It was in this mood that Sachsen found him.

Peter Gross had his head in his hands and his elbows were resting on a table when the aged secretary entered. His long legs were sprawled over a goodly portion of the room. He glowered at a Rembrandesque study of two medicos examining the vitals of a cadaver as though he had a personal interest in the unfortunate corpse. Sachsen cast a shrewd glance at him and lowered his lashes.

"Well, *Vrind Pieter*," he asked heartily, "how goes it? If the *Orang Kayas* continue coming in at this rate I fear me Ah Sing will not have much of an army."

Peter Gross gave an unintelligible grunt.

"It was a bold stroke," Sachsen observed, "to grant a general amnesty, but it will save much bloodshed. It will not accomplish the good that a quick, sharp war, with the villages burned along every water course, would have accomplished, but it will prevent those who are backing Ah Sing from doing what they planned. The depredations of a pirate are a matter of purely local interest. But a popular uprising—ah! that is a matter for chancelleries to consider. If we can hold the Dyak chiefs in line with the aid of Koyala, we have defeated the plans of those who would make this an international affair."

"Yes, I suppose so," Peter Gross affirmed ungraciously.

Sachsen stroked his stubby white beard and thin jaws. The parchmentlike skin seemed to crackle under his thin, bony fingers. He cast a covert glance at Peter Gross from the corner of one eye.

"I have never ceased to congratulate myself, *Vrind Pieter*," he observed, "that I listened to you that night at the *gouverneur-generaal's paleis* at Batavia when you were named resident. Do you recall how firmly you insisted that the Argus Pheasant, Koyala, had been wronged, and how bitterly his excellency opposed? You persuaded him to remove the bounty from her head and to grant her amnesty. Our victory in Bulungan dated from that moment."

"She has been a wonderful help," Peter Gross ac-

knowledged with a faint show of interest. "I frankly confess that I could not have succeeded here had it not been for her help."

"We must do nothing to shake her loyalty," Sachsen declared earnestly. "She is worth more to us than a hundred datoots and kjais. They bend with every breeze; she remains firm and unshaken. She is a woman of great perception and wisdom. She would be a credit to any chancellery in Europe."

"Aye," Peter Gross assented. "It is an eternal shame that she was born the way she was."

"It is not for us to question the ways of Providence," Sachsen rebuked mildly. "Perhaps the good God willed it thus that she might be an instrument for the saving of many lives, and the upbuilding of a great people in this island."

"I haven't the nerve to accuse Providence of playing such a scabby trick as was played on that poor girl," Peter Gross retorted warmly. "I think the devil himself was responsible. If she only didn't have the fatal gift of beauty! But to be forced to see the plainest scrub of a planter's wife pass her by with uptilted nose because she's branded with the bend sinister—it's hell, that's what it is!"

The resident drove his great fist into his palm to emphasize the word.

"*Ja, mynheer,*" Sachsen agreed, "the grief that dwells in her heart must be more than poet or painter can conceive. I cannot bring myself to imagine what the silent hours of night mean to her."

"Agony!" Peter Gross cried bitterly. "Just agony! Do you wonder she flees to the jungle and races down the lanes with the tiger and leopard?"

"I have heard—I have heard," Sachsen assented. "Therefore a thought occurs to me. We must alleviate her woe as much as we can. We must do naught that will increase her pain. Do you not agree with me, *Vrind Pieter?*"

"Most heartily!" the resident asserted. He cast a curious glance at the aged secretary. Long acquaint-



ance with Sachsen had taught him that the wise old counselor rarely talked for the pure pleasure of talking.

"Where is she now?" Sachsen inquired mildly. "I have not seen her here in a day or two."

"I don't know," Peter Gross replied frankly. "She has gone back to the jungle, I think. She may be on her way to Ah Sing's city to do some more spying on her own account, or she may have gone to her temple in the hills. There's a chance, too, that she's at Rotterdam below. The people have begun rebuilding the huts that were burned?"

"When did she leave?"

"Last night—no, the evening before. About sundown, I think. She passed Miss Coston and me near the residency building."

"She did not tell you where she was going?" Sachsen inquired.

"No."

"Did she say aught else?"

"She did not stop to speak," Peter Gross acknowledged. "We only got the merest glimpse of her as she left the road and struck out toward the *plein* along the lane that runs by the side of Blauwpot's rose-garden."

Sachsen stroked his beard thoughtfully. He turned his head to run appraising eyes up and down Peter Gross's stalwart frame.

"Mynheer Gross, has it ever occurred to you that you are young?" he asked. "That you have such inches as are given few men, and a generous endowment of meat upon them? That your features are not wholly unattractive by nature, and that a clean life and sober habits of thinking have given them a prepossessing appearance?"

A look of bewilderment gathered upon Peter Gross's face.

"*Vrind Sachsen*," he replied deliberately, "will you please tell me what in Tophet you are driving at?"

"Only this," the governor's adviser replied. "I think we agreed a short time hence that naught must be done

by either of us that shall bring another tear to Koyala's eyes?"

"Aha!" Peter Gross exclaimed.

"A moment, please!" Sachsen requested sharply. "I claim the indulgence due the aged. My point is this. You are a man, a young man. The priestess Koyala is a woman, a young woman. The Juffrouw Coston is a young woman. Now it is a law of nature that between the ages of fifteen and fifty there exists an affinity between man and woman. This fact prevails regardless of differences in birth or clime. Also it is a law of nature and a law of the Aryans that where two men covet the same woman, or two women the same man, conflict exists. Do you know, *Vrind Pieter*, from the time of the first hewer of wood to this day, all wars are due to this primary cause?" A merry gleam illuminated the aged secretary's eyes.

"But what in Gehenna has this to do with me?" Peter Gross demanded.

"Simply this, *Vrind Pieter*. I beg you to listen calmly. Your heart may be as free and unfettered as the breeze that blows here from Celebes. The Juffrouw Coston may be loyal in heart and soul to the man she has promised to wed, who is now waiting for her in the city that Ah Sing has built."

"She is!" Peter Gross interjected forcibly. "We are good friends, that is all. Absolutely all!"

"I do not doubt it," Sachsen replied tactfully. "But consider this. Before the Juffrouw Coston came it was Koyala with whom you discussed these great problems of state, and the welfare of Bulungan. Since the *jonge juffrouw* came here you have had time for none but her. You devote your evenings to her. You stroll together along the lanes."

"As host I am surely privileged to show her the points of interest?" Peter Gross interrupted.

"Assuredly. But consider how Koyala views it. Before this she commanded such leisure as you might be disposed to give. Now another possesses it. Is it not natural, is it not perfectly human, that she should

feel aggrieved? Place yourself in her position. Contemplate another preempting all Miss Coston's time."

A subdued twinkle gleamed for a moment in Sachsen's eyes and disappeared. "When I came in here," he concluded, "you were as sour as old palm wine. I shall not ask you why. I leave it to your own heart to answer. And I will add—forget not that Koyala feels the same way. *Ja, Vrind Pieter,*" he added softly, "a thousand times more keenly than you does she feel the prick of ingratitude. For the sin of her father is a shame that naught can erase, in this generation or those that follow."

Peter Gross covered his face with his hands. Sachsen rose.

"I leave thee, *Vrind Pieter,*" he announced gently. "In this, as in all other things, I have confidence in thy true judgment."

Tiptoeing out he closed the door silently and returned to his room.

## CHAPTER XXII

### AH SING RETURNS

THE Zuyder Zee lay motionless at anchor in a muddy lagoon. Directly ahead of it the great mangroves thrust their slimy claws into the tepid water and drew sustenance from the rich, black mud below. To one side, in an alluvial flat screened in by a tall growth of almost impenetrable jungle, lay the city Ah Sing and his pirates had built in secret before they delivered their first bold stroke in the capture of the packet Dordrecht. The Natchez, another pirate capture, was at anchor aft of the Zuyder Zee. Both ships were under a strong Chinese and Malay guard.

John Bright, the missionary, the Yankee trader, Jim Poggs, Violet Coston, and Vincent Brady were on the deck of the Zuyder Zee. A hot afternoon sun beat down pitilessly on the craft, making the interior a living inferno. The Manchu warden of the ship had finally yielded to their entreaties and permitted them to come on deck for a bit of air. It was the argument of the missionary that won him over: "If you keep us penned in our cabins below there will be none for whom you can ask ransom."

"Vincent, will we ever escape from here?" Violet Coston groaned. She was very little like the Violet of other days; the heat and privations they had undergone had utterly wilted her.

"Courage, Vi," he replied, giving her a comforting hand-clasp. "Our bankers ought to know by now and they'll surely cable the money at once. I don't doubt Ah Sing will have it when he returns."

"If he shouldn't!" Mrs. Coston gasped.

"We are in God's hands," the missionary counseled gravely.

"I never saw a hole yet that there wasn't some way of crawling out of," the trader remarked cheerfully. "I've got a hunch we're going to crawl out of this one. I don't think they'll get any ransom money from Jim Poggs either, if somebody wants to know."

"Do you think there's a chance for escape?" Violet Coston asked eagerly.

"I ain't holding out any hopes," the trader responded warily. "But I learned something this morning. I know a little Shanghai pidgin, and I heard two of these yellow devils gossiping. They let something drop that set me thinking."

"What was it?" was the simultaneous whisper of the other three.

Poggs lowered his voice.

"This is what it was," he replied. "Do you remember that tall young fellow we had aboard who was the captain's guest and who wasn't seen or heard of again after the scrimmage?"

"Yes." The three spoke as one.

"Do you know who it was? That was Peter Gross, Resident of Bulungan, that's what. He got away. Ah Sing is madder than blazes. He's gone down to Bulungan to wipe him out. But if Peter Gross could crawl out of that hole, with a whole nest of pirates on top of him, he can hold his own at Bulungan. By and by there'll be a gunboat there, and then you'll see the fur begin to fly. When Peter Gross gets going, there's something doing. Believe me, he's a ho-oly terror! Ask any Dyak!"

"Praise God!" John Bright murmured, closing his eyes. "Praise God!"

"Do you think there's a chance, Mr. Bright?" Mrs. Coston begged piteously.

"As I told you that night, Mrs. Coston, when Peter Gross was on the bridge above us and we did not know it, if there is one man in all the Indies who can prevent

a general native uprising and crush piracy, it is Peter Gross. I have all faith in him."

Fresh life glowed in all their faces. Hope shone in their eyes. The Manchu guard stationed near them looked at them curiously. He was wondering what had come over the despised *orang blanda*.

They were eagerly discussing the possibilities of rescue, when loud shouts from the natives on board the Dordrechter attracted their attention. At the same time occupants of the houses on stilts along the water front of Ah Sing's city began capering about the bamboo platforms in front of their houses and gesticulating seaward. Other natives were hurrying to the beach.

Poggs leaped to the rail and peered toward the channel entrance, cunningly concealed by a heavy growth of forest.

"Ah Sing's back!" he exclaimed. "There's his boat coming out of the channel now."

The slim white yacht that had shown her heels to the Prins Lodewyk before the gates of Bulungan glided as gracefully as a swan into the placid waters of the lagoon. In answer to her helm she swung to the right and steamed at half-speed to an anchorage opposite the town. More than a thousand pairs of eyes, including those of the group on the deck of the Zuyder Zee, watched her course with interest.

"Ah Sing hasn't any bunting out," Poggs remarked. "Must be he didn't have much luck on the trip. If that's the case, look out for squalls."

As the anchors were dropped a boat was lowered. A ladder was put over the side and Ah Sing and a couple of stalward Tibetans stepped into the craft. They were promptly rowed ashore, where Ah Sing found a covered sedan chair awaiting him. He stepped inside and drew the curtains to hide his face from the gaping Dyaks and Malays, who took good care to remain a respectful distance away. In this way he was borne to the "long house" that had been built to accommodate him.

Poggs's guess that all had not gone well on the voyage was a shrewd one. The Chinaman had had a profitless trip. His first mishap occurred when on rounding a headland he had run into the Prins. Suspicious at seeing a craft that bore no name on bow or stern and flew no flag, Kapitein Enckel had ordered the stranger to heave-to. Ah Sing promptly turned and put his trust in his engines, rated to produce twenty-three knots an hour by the Japanese builders. They had done better than that and the Prins was out-footed, as those at Fort Wilhelmina had witnessed.

From a passing proa, Ah Sing had learned of Wobanguli's fiasco at Bulungan, his failure to make a bold stroke at the pasar, and his collapse at the sudden appearance of Peter Gross at the council. Had the raja acted with decision, he perceived, the gates of the fort would have been closed to the resident, and his arch-enemy would have been in his power. The miscarriage of his carefully matured plans stirred him to a cold passion of fury, which boded ill for the unfortunate Wobanguli when they met.

Several day's scouring of the seas had brought no return worth the effort made. A Chinese junk laden with edible birds' nests had been seized and sunk and her crew butchered in wanton cruelty. This was contrary to Ah Sing's previously planned policy, but his recent reverses had roused the latent ferocity of the man and made him thirst for gore. There was a Tartar strain in his blood—it made him the capable leader he was, but it also found expression at times in a savage cruelty typical of the race.

As Ah Sing stepped out of the sedan chair, trembling slaves spread mats for him that his sandals might not be soiled. The Chinaman waddled rather than walked into his dwelling, for his great obesity was a burden on days so oppressive as this. At his scowl the poor wretches holding the mats flattened themselves to earth, quivering with terror. Ah Sing passed by their recumbent forms unheeding and entered the cool of the

dwelling, where other trembling slaves stood ready with cooling drinks.

Sipping concoctions of limes and crushed fruit juices with an alcoholic content to give them zip and flavor, the Chinaman rested. Two slaves kept the air stirring about him with fans made from peacock tails. The drone of busy thousands came in muffled voice from the outside, the only sound to be heard except for the swishing of the fans. After an hour's complete relaxation Ah Sing sent for his lieutenants. The various datos and kjais came and went with their reports. A curt question or two was the most he vouchsafed any of them. Most of them he merely dismissed with a curt nod. They sprawled on their stomachs before him in abject terror, for such was the ascendancy which the Batavian *rumah makan* keeper had gained over them.

A lithe young Malay entered finally.

"*Salaamat*, master!" he greeted, as he made obeisance. He was the first to approach this degree of familiarity.

"What have you heard concerning the ransoms for these *orang blanda*?" Ah Sing demanded. He had a deep guttural voice that seemed to come from unfathomable abysses. In fact his voice was one of the secrets of his power.

The Malay turned up deprecating palms. "Master, we returned from Bandjer yesterday," he reported. "Your agent advised us he had received no ransom money."

A baleful gleam lit the Chinaman's eyes.

"Go to Bandjer again at dawn to-morrow, *datoo*," he instructed gutturally. "If the ransom has not come leave word that we have put them to the torture. For each day's delay we will exact a penalty. For the first day an arm shall be cut off at the wrist, for the second, at the elbow, for the third day, at the shoulder. So we will proceed until the soul seeks rest in *Taman Kuring*. Go, I bid you."

The Malay salaamed low and departed.



A Chinaman entered the august presence and kotoed.

"Master," he announced, "the Raja Wobanguli is without and seeks audience."

A light blazed in Ah Sing's eyes. It was the only flicker of expression that he permitted to escape him.

"Bid him come in," he directed.

Wobanguli bent at the waist as he entered, for the portal was not framed for one so tall as he. He was rubbing his hands and smiling unctuously. As he stepped inside he blinked at the subdued light and peered about to distinguish Ah Sing, who was seated at the opposite side of the room, with his fan-bearers standing behind him, and a giant Tibetan armed with a Chinese mace on each side.

The raja kotoed modestly, to indicate the Chinaman's superior rank. His crafty eyes sought to read the pirate chief's face, but Ah Sing's features were as immobile and expressionless as a Buddha idol's.

"*Salaamat*, master! I felicitate you on your safe return," he greeted warmly, in sonorous Malay. "I hope your voyage has been prosperous?"

"Our cause prospers," Ah Sing replied non-committally.

"Two more moons and the last of the *orang blanda* will have been driven from the sacred soil of Borneo!" Wobanguli cried dramatically. "Another moon and other brothers across the seas will have freed their necks from the yoke. There will be a new empire of the Malays and Dyaks, and our sultan will be Ah Sing."

"That is indeed good news, brother," Ah Sing replied. "I take it, therefore, that affairs have prospered with thee in Bulungan?"

The raja tried hard to read the Chinaman's face. Ah Sing kept it in the shadows, but that precaution was needless. He was too subtle, too thoroughly Oriental, too much a master of himself to betray anything he did not desire to reveal. Wobanguli might have studied a block of wood with as much profit.

"I have come overland from Bulungan," he evaded.

"The way is long and my bearers were weary, hence I have been many days on the road. When I left the fort still held out, but the *orang blanda* were pinned in like rats in their holes, and my people were all about. It will not be many days before they succumb, if they have not already perished."

"I heard that new *orang blanda* had come from Java to strengthen the garrison?" Ah Sing asked unemotionally. "Have you heard aught of this?"

"Master, it is true that some have come," Wobanguli acknowledged after a moment's quick thought, during which he anxiously cogitated how much the Chinaman had learned. "But we let these enter the fort. It will be so many more to eat their food and drink their water, and so many more heads for the Punan's lodge-poles when our people climb over the walls."

"Have you heard aught concerning that devil-devil, Peter Gross?"

A moment's consideration persuaded Wobanguli that if Ah Sing had heard of the arrival of reinforcements at the fort, he must know of Peter Gross's safe return to Bulungan also, and its attendant circumstances.

"Master," he declared with great show of earnestness, "I tell you strange things. The day of the pasar came and we waited for thy message. The *Orang Blanda Kapala*, warned, I fear, by the offspring of Chawatangi, refused to enter the city with his troops. When the Dattoo of Katara came late in the afternoon, I summoned the chiefs and the *kjais* to a *bitchara* at my long house. The talk was long, the hour waxed late. When the argument was hottest one came into the room in the semblance of the resident. Some say it was him in body, and some say it was his ghost. But we all believed it was his spirit, for had not the Dattoo of Katara assured us that Peter Gross had perished in the sea and that his *kalalungan* was now on the way to the *Gunong Lumut*, the Mount of Moss? An evil spirit came upon us. It was the magic of his eyes. Our blood was like water. Thy datoo he broke like a reed and

threw from him. I barely escaped. The next day he was at the fort. Surely the white man's god bore him out of the clutches of the sharks of the sea and brought him back to Bulungan that he might die there with his people?"

"He was with thee and all thy chiefs and thou didst let him pass from thee in safety?" Ah Sing asked caressingly.

Something in the Chinaman's tones caused the raja's cowardly blood to chill.

"It was his spirit, O master!" he cried, "by Djath, and by the *hanu token*, and by the little ghosts that flit about the *Padang Batu*, the great stone fields, I assure you it was his spirit in the body of the white man's god."

"He was with thee and thy chiefs and thou didst let him pass from thee in safety," the Chinaman repeated. "Do you know, raja, that he has set a price on thy head?"

"Let him come and take it!" the raja cried boastfully, in a voice pitched too high to be confident. "He will never get it."

"No, he will never get it," Ah Sing replied soothingly. "Because," he shouted, "I shall have it! Seize him," he cried, turning to his Tibetans, "seize him and bind him!"

The raja's world rocked. He was too terror-stricken to offer resistance. As the giant Chinaman leaped toward him he sank to his knees with a cry for mercy. In a thrice he was bound hand and foot.

Ah Sing slowly rose, lifting his huge body with an effort. There was a sardonic smile on his face; so had he looked when he first registered Adriaan Adriaanszoon Van Schouten and Peter Gross as victims of his vengeance. He spurned the prostrate raja with his foot.

"Take out his lying tongue," he directed, "lest I hear more falsehoods." As one of the Tibetans came forward with an instrument for that purpose the raja uttered a despairing shriek. The next moment he was rendered silent forever.

"Now put out those eyes that gleam only with craft and guile," the pirate chief directed. The executioner knelt and forced out the eyeballs with his thumb.

Dumb and sightless, the unfortunate raja, a victim of his own untrustworthiness, writhed for a while on the floor of the house. Ah Sing sat by the living corpse, gloating over it. The shades of night were falling when he summoned one of his guards again.

"Strike off his head," he directed, "and post it over the city gates. And put over it this wording, in the Malay, the Dyak, and the Bajau tongues:

"This is the end of those who disobey the master.'"

## CHAPTER XXIII

### KOYALA'S OFFER

AS night came on the glow of lights began to appear in the streets of Ah Sing's city. Light streamed also through the chinks in the bamboo houses and from the open doors. But the "long house" where the dread master hid was swathed in sable darkness. In an interior room where only a dim taper burned, Ah Sing sat alone and meditated on the failure of his plans to grasp Bulungan and its resident by two bold strokes. The conduct of his pusillanimous ally, the Raja Wobanguli, had lost the residency capital for him, he reasoned. That treachery had been punished, so there was an end to that. But Peter Gross's escape was a more difficult problem. How the resident had been able to get ashore through shark-infested seas without any one of the multitude of proas seeing him was a mystery too deep for the Chinaman to solve.

Like all great leaders, who are more or less dreamers, Ah Sing was superstitious. His superstitious instincts were now being aroused over Peter Gross. The resident had escaped his carefully woven nets so often that Ah Sing was beginning to feel that his arch enemy had a charmed life. It was a dangerous notion for him to entertain, at this time, when his fortunes were in so hazardous a condition. But it put him into the mood for any stroke, however desperate it might appear, that promised to put Peter Gross's person into his power.

It was in this mood that Koyala found him.

Disdaining the request of a Chinese majordomo that she wait in a reception hall until Ah Sing indicated

whether he would see her, she strode through the house to the Chinaman's private apartment. At the door, one of the pirate chief's huge Tibetans interposed his bulk and shining mace. Koyala's lips curved in a smile of cynical contempt.

"Are you so afraid of a woman that you must hide behind the ax of a slave, Ah Sing?" she asked, lifting her voice.

There was a moment's silence. Then the authoritative voice of the Chinaman announced:

"Let her come in."

The guard stood aside and Koyala passed haughtily by. She carried herself like a queen as she entered. There was none of the servile subserviency of the late raja in her demeanor. Ah Sing, grim, inscrutable, watched her enter from the shadows. His eyes gleamed with admiration, then regained their customary expressionlessness. But Koyala, who could see in the darkness almost as well as in the light, did not fail to note the gleam or to interpret its meaning.

"You are lonely, Ah Sing," she remarked. "Are you under a vow to Allah or do your datoots and kjais esteem it too great an honor to sit with their chief?" There was a trace of mockery in her tone.

Ah Sing regarded her fixedly, but he said nothing. She glanced at him inquiringly, and seeing he did not intend to reply, began idly flecking her sandals with a light whip she carried.

"You have come from your temple?" the Chinaman inquired gutturally.

Koyala knew that the Chinaman was aware, through his spies, of her movements, but it pleased her to be perverse.

"Some time since," she remarked lightly.

"You have been in the villages of the Trings and the Kenyahs?"

"One-two moons ago," Koyala replied. "I brought offerings to their *ganeca* idols."

"You have heard naught, then, from Bulungan?" the Chinaman inquired idly.

"Your news must be later than mine, Ah Sing, since I see the head of Bulungan's raja on your gates," Koyala retorted coolly.

Ah Sing gazed at her intently. His eyes were like a leopard's in the dark, two dots of green fire that scintillated but did not blink. Koyala continued tapping her foot lightly with the whip.

"He was false to me, therefore he died," he declared finally. It was a passionless utterance, spoken like a judge's decree.

"To kill their raja seems to me a strange way to win the allegiance and favor of the Dyaks whose territory you occupy," Koyala observed.

"The Dyaks speak through their kjais and head men," Ah Sing replied. "They have taken the oath with me, they have seen to-day my vengeance when that oath is broken."

"The Dyaks are one people," Koyala retorted sharply. "They speak through their council. Woe to the chief who violates the law of the council!"

"And greater woe to him who breaks his oath to Ah Sing!" the Chinaman declared sternly. "Woman, why have you come?" he suddenly demanded. "Are you here as friend or foe, as priestess of the people of Borneo, or the servant of the *orang blanda* pig who wallows on the heights over Bulungan?"

Koyala's cheeks flamed.

"And if I choose not to say?" she demanded.

"Those who enter the tiger's lair must not whine if they feel the tiger's claws," Ah Sing returned significantly.

Koyala rose and drew herself to her full height. The Chinaman rose also, with a wary eye upon her, for he knew her nimbleness with the dagger. Of Napoleonic stature as well as of mind, he made a grotesque figure as he faced her, for she was at least two inches taller than he. His eyes glowed, but not with anger. There was a covetous leer in them that made the pure virgin blood of the tempestuous priestess boil within her.

"You forget, Ah Sing, that this is Borneo, the land

of my people," she said in a low voice, vibrant with passion.

"I am sultan here," the Chinaman returned. "This is my house, and my city. These are my guards at the door." There was a note of triumph and exultation in his voice; his eyes held the look of a hunter finding game in his snares.

Koyala's lips curled with scorn.

"Do you think you can deal with me as you dealt with Wobanguli, Ah Sing?" she demanded. "Here I am—tell your slaves to bind me." She thrust out her arms palms upward, to suit action to the words. "But outside," she cried, "are my people! Outside are the Punans, the little men of the jungle. They wait for my return, Ah Sing. If I not return, do you know what will happen? Ask your datoots. Ask your kjais. Ask them what escape there is by sea if the little men close the channel. Ask them what escape there is by land when the little men fill the woods. Ask where water will come from, for this, your city, when every tree hides a Punan, and every Punan has his sumpitan to rain poisoned darts on those who leave the gates."

The Chinaman's sallow face blanched. He knew full well how dependent he was on his savage allies, how thin his tenure of power would be if the Dyaks turned against him. He knew also the extreme reverence in which Koyala was held by these simple children of nature, superstitious to the last degree, and convinced that she was a direct gift of Djath vouchsafed the people of Bulungan through the intercession of her demigod grandfather, the miracle-working witch-doctor, Chawatangi.

"There is none who speaks of slaves to bind you," he replied. "But if you come as a friend, speak. Or if you come as the messenger of the *orang blanda*, speak."

"I come as neither," she returned shortly. "I come as Koyala, the woman."

An unbelieving light shone for a moment in the Chinaman's eyes. It softened into doubt, then cre-



dulity, as a long cherished hope flamed again in his breast.

"Once before I offered you my throne as sultanness, O *Bintang Burung*," he said fervently. "I offer it again." He hung breathlessly upon her reply.

Koyala's face hardened. There was a measure of contempt in her tone as she replied: "As I told you then, Ah Sing, the Argus Pheasant is for no man. She is dedicated to the service of Djath."

Ah Sing's face quivered with fury. His almost steel-clad self-control broke down and in his anger he hardly kept himself from grasping her.

"Thou art mine and shall be mine," he cried hoarsely, taking a step forward. A glittering dagger blocked his march of progress.

"Don't be a fool, Ah Sing," Koyala advised in a low voice. "I have come here as an ally to offer assistance and to request it. Have you the patience to listen?"

The Chinaman pulled himself together with an effort. Deep as the hurt was he could hide it, as he had hidden it before in Djath's temple. After all, ambition was his first love, and after that cupidity. His ferret eyes regained their usual bland expression, which was a mask for Oriental cunning and deceit.

"What assistance can you give?" he asked.

"This," she replied. "Since the *orang blanda* stronghold at Bulungan has not fallen, since on the contrary the *orang blanda's* guns command Bulungan, and since there have been no rich prizes and no loot, my people are beginning to waver in their allegiance. I will hold them loyal. Second, and this is also my condition for the faithful performance of the first, I want your assistance in abducting a white maid from the *orang blanda* stronghold. No harm must come to her, but she must be included among the captives held for ransom. On no condition must Peter Gross hear aught of what has become of her."

"That is all?" the Chinaman asked.

"That is all," Koyala replied.

Ah Sing's ferretlike eyes gazed at her steadily. He

was seeking to read her thoughts, to interpret the emotions that unintentionally expressed themselves on her plastic countenance. As he read the changes recorded there he pieced out the riddle and satisfied himself that his interpretation was correct: Peter Gross enamored of the stranger; Koyala, in love with Peter Gross, jealous. It was a reasonable explanation. He asked a guarded question to test it.

"Is this woman fair in the eyes of Peter Gross?"

"It seems so," Koyala retorted bitterly. "He spends most of his time with her."

Satisfied that he had got to the bottom of the matter, the Chinaman began to scheme how he could turn this knowledge and Koyala's overtures to his advantage. A cunning grin overspread his face. If the woman were abducted, he reasoned, the resident would naturally follow, especially if a suitable decoy were put out. His slim forces could be tangled in the jungle and annihilated. The plan was perfect! That Koyala, herself infatuated with Peter Gross, should propose it, gave a touch of humor to the situation. He quaked inwardly with mirth.

"How shall this be performed?" he asked.

"Each morning, after sunrise, the woman takes the path that leads to the sea from the fort and walks along the beach," Koyala stated. "Send a trustworthy kjai and six Dyaks with me, with orders to conceal themselves at dawn in the bush alongside the road where it turns just beyond a huge boulder. They must not let themselves be seen from the fort, and this is the only portion of the road which the sentries on the walls do not overlook. The woman must be seized quickly and silenced before she can make outcry. Then she must be brought here. But no harm must be done her."

"It shall be done," Ah Sing pledged. "Do thou keep thy promise with thy people."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A MAN'S TASK

SIX hundred colonials, skilled bush-fighters all, were drilling on the *plein* of Bulungan under the approving eyes of His Excellency, the Jonkheer Adriaan Adriaanszoon Van Schouten and their new commander-in-chief, Peter Gross. They executed the various maneuvers right smartly, with a precision that left nothing to be desired. At the end of an hour's drill the *gouverneur-generaal* turned a piercing glance upward at his tall lieutenant and barked:

"Well, Mynheer Gross, what do you say? Do you think they will fight?"

"I hope Ah Sing will let us catch him," the resident replied gravely.

A gleam of pleasure lit the executive eye.

"*Gewisselijk, mynheer!* But we trust your cunning to put salt on the vulture's tail."

He beckoned to the officer in charge. "*Nu, genoeg,*" he directed. "March them back to the fort. And give each man an allowance of wine to-night as a token of my appreciation."

The words were spoken loudly enough to be heard by those in the first ranks. A non-commissioned officer addressed a few words to his commander. The permission asked was smilingly given. The next moment the entire body broke into a lusty cheer for their *gouverneur-generaal*. Van Schouten's back straightened stiffly and his chest protruded another inch. Like one who is very much pleased with himself and the whole world, he stalked away to his horse and mounted.

"Devil take that resident of mine, where has he dis-

appeared?" he muttered under his breath as he looked around for Peter Gross. A moment later he spied the tall form of the resident hurrying across the *plein* toward Grace Coston.

"H-m!" Van Schouten muttered. "For one who swore to me his indifference to the female world in general this Mynheer Gross has peculiar methods of showing it." His sharp features softened under a smile.

"Amsterdam!" he murmured affectionately. "What wouldn't I give to live again my youthful days at the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam. *Verdamp!* Let him go."

He drove the spurs into his horse and galloped away.

Grace greeted Peter Gross with a face glowing with enthusiasm.

"It was wonderful!" she declared. "I never saw a body of men train so perfectly."

"You should see them in the jungle," Peter Gross replied. "I have the cream of the colonial force here, for, for once, His Excellency did not stint me his very best." He appeared as happy as a schoolboy.

A shade of anxiety came into Grace's face.

"How soon are you going in search of Ah Sing?" she asked.

"In a few days, I hope," Peter Gross replied soberly, the joyous light dying in his features. "I cannot say positively when. The Juffrouw Koyala promised to guide us, but she has not been here for several days. If she does not come to-morrow we will probably start and leave word for her to follow."

"Will you take the entire force?"

"We will leave a sufficient guard for the fort, of course," Peter Gross evaded.

"I understand. But of those who go, will they all go in one body?"

"That would be revealing our strategy," the resident pointed out gravely. "I couldn't do that, Miss Coston. Not even to you," he added softly.

"Of course not! I shouldn't have asked." Grace's glance flitted toward the jungle and rested there. "I

was wondering," she said, "whether Ah Sing might not have sent some of his prisoners into the interior. It has been such a long time since we've had any word from them. All we've heard has been through Koyala."

"We can absolutely rely on any information she brings us," Peter Gross declared quickly.

"I suppose so," Grace replied indifferently.

Peter Gross's brows narrowed. "You don't trust her," he accused.

Grace's eyes rose to meet his. "To be quite frank, Mr. Gross, I don't," she declared.

"Why?" It was like a challenge.

Grace gave him a quick glance and lowered her lids again. "I don't know," she replied. "Intuition, I suppose one might call it."

"You do her an injustice," Peter Gross declared warmly.

"I think she means well," Grace replied slowly. "But I'm afraid, I'm afraid—"

"Of what?"

"That she cannot trust herself."

Peter Gross's brows knitted. "What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Think it over," Grace advised. "I dislike saying these things. I'm afraid you think I'm catty. But really, I'd be easier in mind if you went into the jungle without her as guide than with her."

Peter Gross gazed thoughtfully at the jungle.

"They are going back to the fort," Grace declared, rising. Accommodating his pace to hers, Peter Gross strolled with her in the rear of the marching troops and the few civilians who had watched the drill. Neither spoke, each being busy with thoughts that it was not discreet to utter. As they reached the main traveled highway leading down-grade to the town of Bulungan, Peter Gross stopped and pointed to the city below, emerging from its ashes.

"My kingdom!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Two years of work there, and what progress have I made?"

"Why do you stay?" Grace asked. "You are a for-

eigner here. Your work can never gain you preferment. Across the water is your own country, waiting for men who can do things. Hasn't she first right to you?"

Her voice was wondrously alluring, wondrously sweet. A poignant sense of all that he had left behind and lost in exiling himself in this savagely cruel tropic island came upon Peter Gross. The bitter feeling that his life had been wasted obsessed him. Now that the immediate danger was past, and the arrival of troops had insured the safety of the fort he began to look back and measure the ground lost. Conscientious to a high degree, he felt a deep sense of personal responsibility in the defection of the Dyaks, and their treachery affected him deeply. Grace's suggestion, therefore, came at a time when he was extraordinarily receptive to such a proposal.

"There's work in the United States to be done also," Grace declared. "There's construction to be done. We are a comparatively new nation and we have a tremendous lot to do before we develop the country. There are millions of acres out West waiting for cultivation. There are problems of transportation. You, as a sailor, should know the deficiency of our merchant marine."

She spoke with an ardent patriotism, feeling herself a soldier in a righteous cause.

"My country is at peace," Peter Gross argued weekly. "It hasn't any particular need of me."

"It has need of every American citizen whether at peace or at war," Grace blazed. "The duty a man owes to his country is the same as that he owes to his family. He should place it first, peace or war."

Unconsciously their footsteps had been lagging. Peter Gross stopped abruptly, his attention caught by a huge yellow spider that had spun a web in the grass along the border of the highway. A cricket was enmeshed in the silken threads and struggled frantically to free itself. The spider ran forward. A stroke of its fangs and the cricket succumbed. The spider began toiling a web about it.

"How cruel!" Grace exclaimed, shuddering. "I hate spiders."

Peter Gross rose to his full height.

"Miss Coston," he declared, and there was a different ring in his voice than there had been before, "I'm glad this matter has come up. I'm glad it has come up in just this way, and at just this time. And I call it God's blessing that it happened right here."

He stepped forward quickly and ground the spider underfoot.

"You see," he said gently, "there are some of us in this world that have to get rid of the spiders. It isn't a pleasant task, but it has to be done. And this man Ah Sing is a spider. A big, yellow spider, spinning webs in this far corner of the globe where some thirty million people possess only the rudiments of civilization and live by superstition. Someone must crush him. It seems that I have been chosen for the work. I may not like it, but that's neither here nor there. I believe that when all's said and done I can serve my country and the world better here than I can digging oysters in Chesapeake Bay or running a coaster to Cuba."

Grace looked seaward where the Prins Lodewyk and another gunboat, together with two coasters, lay riding at anchor. Her eyes misted.

"When your work here is done, Mr. Gross, I hope you will come to us in America," she replied softly.

## CHAPTER XXV

### GRACE COSTON DISAPPEARS

"**M**YNHERR GROSS, have you seen the Jonge Juffrouw Coston this morning?"

The speaker was the Juffrouw Van Voort. She entered Peter Gross's *sanctum sanctorum* precipitately, without the formality of knocking. Her manner was flurried, and there was a note of anxiety in her voice.

"No, I have not," Peter Gross replied. "Is she missing?"

"I cannot find her, *mynheer*." The little woman's lip quivered. "She has not been seen since morning. We missed her at the rice table and she did not return for *siesta*. I have been searching nearly an hour and I cannot find any trace of her."

"That is strange," Peter Gross replied, rising. He spoke calmly, but there was a tremor in his voice. "When was she last seen?"

"We had breakfast about six o'clock," the Juffrouw Van Voort related. "The *jonge juffrouw* usually takes a walk to the beach in the morning before the sun gets hot, as *mynheer* knows. She left at the customary hour. That is the last I have seen of her."

"Paddy Rouse was on guard duty this morning," Peter Gross remarked, struck with a sudden thought. "He may have seen her."

"I have been seeking Mynheer Rouse," the *juffrouw* stated. "I cannot find him."

"He's up-stairs in the chart-room," the resident replied. "I'll call him." He buzzed for an orderly. A few moments later Paddy entered the room.



"Did Miss Coston take her customary walk to the beach this morning?" Peter Gross asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Did she return?"

"I don't know, sir. I was relieved shortly after she passed through the gate."

"Then you don't know in what direction she went after reaching the bottom of the hill?"

"Faith, sir, I don't know whether she even went to the bottom of the hill," Paddy declared. "You know the big outcrop of rock, sir, that the boys call the camel's hump, where the path turns? I saw her get as far as that. I naturally kept looking for her where the path winds into sight again for anyone standing on the wall but she didn't show up. I thought she'd probably stopped on the way—to pick a flower perhaps—and didn't think any more of it. About fifteen minutes later I was relieved."

"Who relieved you?" The words came like a pistol-shot. Peter Gross was angered.

"Van Vlaanderen."

"Did you tell him Miss Coston had left the fort?"

"No, sir."

Peter Gross compressed his lips. Paddy flushed guiltily, realizing his delinquency.

"Call Private Van Vlaanderen," he directed. "Have him hurry."

The Dutchman was a soldier and nothing but a soldier. His replies to the resident's questions were terse and to the point. He had not seen the Jonge Juffrouw Coston. He was of the opinion that she could not have appeared either on the path running down from the fort to the beach or on the beach itself without his observing her. One statement of his was particularly illuminative.

"There was someone in the bush near the *Kameel-bochel* (camel's hump), *mynheer*," he declared. "As I came up to relieve Mynheer Rouse a lory was singing in the bush. It stopped in the middle of its song and flew swiftly away."

"You are an excellent observer," Peter Gross com-

plimented. "I shall be pleased to recommend you to your *kapitein*."

Van Vlaanderen withdrew, pleasure lighting his face.

"If we'd only had him on guard duty instead of Paddy," Peter Gross groaned. "The youngster means well, but he's irresponsible." He turned to the *Juffrouw Van Voort*.

"I shall make search at once," he promised. "Keep me informed if you hear anything, *juffrouw*."

Peter Gross himself and several of his best Javanese scouts hurried down the hill to the protruding ridge of rock. Not far from its base one of the scouts quickly found a spot where the grass has been trampled. A rod farther was a space about five yards in diameter, where the rank grasses had been flattened and twisted, as though several persons had engaged in a violent struggle. The spot was effectually screened from the highway by the rank tropic growth. A plain trail led from it to the screen of trees to the thicker jungle beyond.

The simplest mind could read the story that the trampled grass told. There was no need for the scouts to explain. They saw the lines of anxiety deepen in their leader's drawn face and looked away.

Peter Gross wasted no time in deciding on his course of action. He despatched two scouts with instructions to follow the trail as far as they could until night fell, and then return. This done he hurried back to the fort.

By this time the alarm was general. Captain Carver, Lieutenant Van Voort, Paddy Rouse, the aged Sachsen, and even the *gouverneur-generaal* himself, were at the gate to meet him. He described briefly what they had found.

"*Ach lieve, lieve!*" Mrs. Van Voort cried, wringing her hands. The governor-general swore a deep and fervent oath in polysyllabic Dutch. Sachsen and the soldiers were silent.

"Boots and saddles?" Captain Carver asked in a low aside when the rain of questions had ceased.

"We'll take the trail as soon as the scouts report,"

Peter Gross replied. "Unless we find they've taken to water."

"How many?"

"Fifty. Pick the best we have."

Carver nodded and withdrew. Their whispered colloquy was unnoticed by the others except Sachsen, who asked no questions.

Peter Gross hurriedly packed his kit and paced his room while waiting word from Carver that the troops were ready. He had no appetite and could not endure the farce of taking his customary place at the *gouverneur-generaal's* right. His face was drawn and hard, and his great hands clenched and unclenched in agony of spirit. If this was Ah Sing's work, why should the Chinaman have abducted the girl? he asked himself. There were other equally valuable prisoners in the pirate camp. Was it a stratagem, a scheme, to entice him from the fort and lure him into ambush? Were the pirates strong enough to give battle?

Or was this, he asked himself, the work of some other enemy? Was it Wobanguli? He dismissed the thought. The raja was too crafty to try such means at arranging a bargain for he knew the *orang blanda* was more generous in granting the prayer of a suppliant than in barter. Who else could it be?

A persistent suspicion, a suspicion born of frequent warnings, yet one that he indignantly rejected each time it came within the plane of his consciousness, plagued his soul. Could Koyala have been concerned in this outrage? It was incredible. She had been his staunchest ally, the firm rock on which his administration of this turbulent residency rested. But of late she had been less communicative, less friendly. Her continued absence was unaccountable. And he realized, too, with a sinking heart, that there was a violent antagonism between Grace Coston, the American girl, of wealth and culture, and Koyala, the half-breed priestess of the Dyaks of Bulungan.

"It can't be, it can't be," he groaned. Yet a nameless and intuitive fear filled his heart that it might be.

He was cogitating thus when his door softly opened, and a footstep sounded. Looking up he saw Sachsen, the aged counselor. The old man smiled and tottered within. Peter Gross assisted him to a comfortable chair.

The old man chatted for a time without referring to the incidents of the day. Peter Gross's replies were largely monosyllabic. Finally Sachsen said:

"This is a terrible thing, *Vrind Pieter*, a terrible thing. It is hard to believe that the *jonge juffrouw* could be carried off in this way under the very eyes of our sentinels."

"It was cleverly done," Peter Gross replied grimly. "They evidently knew she was coming and had the whole thing carefully prepared. I cannot understand, however, how they persuaded her to leave the road and go into the thicket."

Sachsen stole a sidelong glance at his protégé. "I have been thinking of that, too," he replied. "It is very strange. One would almost be tempted to think that someone she felt she could trust called her."

"Who could that be?" Peter Gross demanded.

Sachsen shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know," he replied. "You are more familiar with your people of the residency than I, *Vrind Pieter*. I merely suggest this, but it may afford you a clue."

"Let us have no beating about the bush, *Vrind Sachsen*," Peter Gross replied sternly. "What you are trying to intimate is that *Koyala* may have had a hand in this."

"All things are possible," Sachsen declared, careful not to offend. "It is one of the questions we must consider."

"*Sachsen*," Peter Gross cried, "I wish to Heaven I had listened to you a few days ago."

"Regret is the mother of wisdom," Sachsen observed, brightening. His task was not to be so hard as he had expected. "But this is no time to philosophize. It is rather for us to consider what we must do."

"Do?" Peter Gross exclaimed. "Why, rescue her! And stamp out this pirate-nest at the same time!"

"Are your plans fully made?" the old man asked.

"They will be the moment I get a report from the scouts I sent out."

"You will leave at once?"

"Yes."

"With how many men?"

"I've asked Carver to give me fifty."

"*Vrind Pieter*," Sachsen asked gravely, "have you considered that this may be a trap set by that arch-devil, Ah Sing? He knows how fond you are of this maid. He knows what time you have spent in her company—"

"We are merely good friends," Peter Gross interrupted, bristling.

"A man will do much for his friend," Sachsen observed. *Sotto voce* he added: "Particularly if that friend be a maid." Aloud he continued: "Ah Sing is clever enough to bait his trap wisely. He could not have better bait than the *jonge juffrouw*."

"I thought you were under the impression Koyala had a hand in her abduction," Peter Gross asked irritably.

"The Argus Pheasant and the Yellow Spider may be leagued together," Sachsen replied sagely. "That, too, is a possibility we must consider."

"I can't believe it!" Peter Gross exclaimed.

Sachsen shook his head. "*Vrind Pieter*, my son, you are an obstinate creature," he replied, smiling. "I admire your faith in this woman. I would I did not have all this sorry knowledge of the frailty of humanity that I possess so that I could trust thus also. But I cannot. I have been in Oost-Indië too long. As I interpret this happening, it was planned by Ah Sing, and executed by his emissaries. In it he had the help of someone whom the *jonge juffrouw* was disposed to trust. I know of but one such person outside of those here in the fort whom we have present and accounted for, and that is the *Bintang Burung*."

"You know, too, what a help she has been to me," Peter Gross replied.

"Ja, *Vrind Pieter*, I do. But you have a saying in English, 'Hell knows no fury like a woman scorned.'"

Our own Joost Van Vondel says the same thing in slightly different language. A woman as fiery as this Koyala will leap from a heaven of affection to a hell of hate in a single moment. As there is no faithfulness like the faithfulness of a woman, so is there also no faithlessness like the faithlessness of woman. Consider this well, my son."

"What do you advise, Sachsen?" the resident asked.

"Send out your scouts. Send out your police, and seize every Dyak whom you may suspect knows something. Bulungan must be full of *bruinevels* who are laughing at our ignorance. Make them speak; threaten them with the torture, if need be. The time is past for clemency, and these treacherous heathen must feel the iron heel. When you have the information you desire, perfect your plans accordingly. Then strike, *Vrind Pieter*, strike with the suddenness of a thunderbolt, as you did two years ago at Kwanga River."

"But what will happen to Miss Coston in the mean time?" Peter Gross cried.

"She is too valuable to Ah Sing to be harshly treated," Sachsen replied. "Twenty-four hours spent in securing information will not be time wasted."

There was a slight commotion outside. An orderly entered, saluted, and announced:

"The scouts are back, sir."

"Send them in," Peter Gross directed.

The report of the Javanese was brief. The trail terminated on the seashore about an hour's journey south of the fort. The abductors had thus effectually concealed their tracks. As the scouts left Peter Gross turned to Sachsen.

"I shall adopt your suggestion, *Vrind Sachsen*," he declared.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A WOMAN'S JEALOUSY

**W**HEN Grace walked down the thicket-lined path that runs from the fort to the beach, she was in love with life and all the good things of the universe. It was a perfect morning. Nature had never created a more divine hour. The sun was not yet so high as to be unpleasant, the cooling southeast monsoon held the ascendancy and fanned her cheek, the birds were singing their full hearts out, and the trees and bushes were in their brightest dress, for there had been a light shower the night before that had cleared away the orange-clay dust. It was good to be alive and be part and parcel of all this beauty and happiness. So, humming blithely an air more familiar to New York theaters than to this distant tropic region, she tripped gayly down the path and after bidding Paddy Rouse a cheery good morning.

There was nothing to hurry her, so she drawled along the way. A bright bit of coral attracted her attention and she picked it up and studied its colors. Two trogons became engaged in an altercation, and she listened to their bickering with considerable amusement, thinking how like humans they were. Perceiving hibiscus abloom along the border of the lane she plucked it and pinned the bright scarlet flower on her blouse. She did not notice that several pairs of fierce eyes were stealthily watching her approach from behind the protective cover of the heavy cane growth.

As she entered the depression at the foot of the Camel's Hump, where the path crooked, she perceived

Koyala seated at the base of the rock. The Argus Pheasant, in an apparent fit of petulance, was tearing the petals from a beautiful orchid.

"Good morning," Grace greeted. "Isn't it a delightful morning?"

"Good morning," Koyala responded sullenly.

Grace felt the other woman's antagonism. She herself experienced a curious aversion to her. Koyala, in her happier moments, was unquestionably beautiful, but Koyala, sullen and vindictive, revealed her Dyak origin. Her face was marred by hardness and cruelty, which, though they did not alter its perfect lines, repulsed those who approached her.

An awkward silence followed for a moment. Perceiving that Koyala was in an ungracious mood and indisposed to conversation Grace began to walk away. The Argus Pheasant sprang to her feet and tossed the flower she held into the path in front of Grace.

"There," she cried. "I hate orchids."

"To me they are the most beautiful flowers in the world," Grace observed quietly.

"You are welcome to them," Koyala replied indifferently. "They are common here--there are some growing not ten paces from where we are."

"There are!" Grace exclaimed delightedly. "Where are they?"

"Here," Koyala replied. She parted the branches of the thicket and passed through.

Grace hesitated a moment. She had been warned by both Lieutenant and Mrs. Van Voort not to leave the paved highways, for there was always danger for a white person in the jungle. Moreover, she had an intuitive distrust of Koyala. But the latter appeared indifferent whether the white girl followed her or not. Knowing the priestess's hot temper Grace desired to avoid giving offense. Therefore, she did the forbidden thing and followed.

Koyala was about three yards ahead. Grace was admiring her dexterousness in gliding through the thickly



twined tropic growth when a hand suddenly closed over her mouth. At the same instant her arms were pinioned to her side and her feet were lifted from the ground. Thongs were passed around her limbs and body. A gag was forced into her mouth. There was no opportunity to cry for help.

In the brief moments of her capture and binding a myriad thoughts raced through Grace's mind. The first was a blind wave of terror. Then consciousness of her condition. Then self-reproach at the violation of Lieutenant and Mrs. Van Voort's express requests. And finally a sense of disgust at her own gullibility.

Looking up she saw the cold, cruel eyes of the Argus Pheasant looking upon her. A vindictive satisfaction appeared in the priestess's face. There was no gloating, no leer of triumph, in her expression, but a fixed and passionless hate that found a gloomy contentment in accomplishing its purposes.

"Place her on the litter and cover her so that none can see," Koyala directed. The Dyaks did as bidden.

Then began a long, and to Grace, a seemingly interminable, march through the jungle in which she was jolted from side to side, and often bruised against tree-trunks. Her face was hooded so that she could see nothing, and even experienced difficulty in breathing. The physical discomfort thus provoked was increased as the sun mounted higher and poured its fiery rays upon the sweating, steaming forest. But Koyala and the bearers were seemingly tireless.

At length she was dropped on a hard but rounding surface. A gentle cradling motion apprized her that she was in a small boat of some kind. She was transferred from this to a larger vessel. Then the hood was removed and her thongs cut. Koyala herself removed the gag.

The indignities and discomforts she had suffered had roused Grace to a violent state of anger. When, therefore, she found herself in a crude cabin with the author of these misfortunes, she ached to express herself. But

her course toward Koyala had been previously decided, during the hour when she was being borne through the jungle by the Dyaks, and she retained her self-control with a powerful effort. Acting as though unconscious of Koyala's presence she adjusted her garments for greater comfort and fluffed and combed her hair. A glint of amusement lit the priestess's eye.

"Miss Coston," she said, "your presence here is as unpleasant to me as my presence is to you. But it was necessary for the good of Borneo. Peter Gross is needed too badly in Bulungan to permit you to entice him to return to America."

The implied taunt in the priestess's last phrase swept away Grace's resolutions and she turned on her abductor in white heat.

"I am not in Mr. Gross's confidence and do not know his plans," she retorted. "But I am perfectly positive that he'll not marry any woman from Borneo."

The livid Dyak blood flamed to Koyala's face. Her hand swept inside her *cabaya* for her dagger and flashed forth the blade. A fury almost maniacal filled her face as she raised the steel over Grace Coston's heart.

Pale as a lily-of-the-valley, but standing firm and unafraid, Grace faced her foe and waited for the dagger to descend.

The blow did not fall. It was their glances that clashed, and once again blood counted. The elemental fury and passion of Chawatangi's descendant was no match for the Caucasian pride of Grace Coston.

Koyala thrust her dagger into its sheath as suddenly as she had withdrawn it, and with a low sob threw herself on a rude bench. The tears began to flow and she wept unrestrainedly, her bosom racked with great sobs. Grace watched her in silence and amazement. At first she stood coldly aloof, with frigid indifference. But as the Argus Pheasant maintained her unrestricted flow of tears a warmer feeling came into her heart. Pity was born and under the impulse of that emotion she finally crossed timidly to Koyala's side and said:

"Koyala, I'm sorry—I beg your pardon for what I've said."

Koyala's sobbing did not cease. Grace sat beside her and placed a sisterly arm about her shoulders. On the touch of that embrace Koyala jumped as though a snake had crawled upon her. She lifted a tear-stained face struggling with various emotions. Grief, pain, shame, and hate all were expressed there.

"Do you think I would marry him?" she cried. "Do you think I would give myself to any man? Should I bring into the world children to suffer again what I have suffered? I would die a thousand times first. But you—you"—she struggled inarticulately, the very violence of her emotion defeating speech—"you would take from us all that we have. In all the years that the *orang blanda* has ruled in this unhappy country violence and robbery have reigned. We have suffered more from him than ever we suffered from other tribes. Now comes one man who has dealt justly with us, and him you would dare entice away."

She paused, choking. Suddenly she spoke again with redoubled violence. "No, I did not steal you that you might not have him!" she cried. "For you would not have him. He is a boy in heart, and he might be weak and foolish enough to give way to your wiles. But you would not accept him. You would cast him away. You would trample on the affection he offered you. You would laugh at him. You are white, woman, and you are therefore a wanton." Her voice rose to a high-pitched scream. "You take from a man his best and give nothing in return. You are false, false, you have the falseness of the *orang blanda*. There is no purity or chastity in you. You steal the soul and withhold the body and call that chastity. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

It was the laughter of a maniac. Grace, whose cheeks had flushed a furious crimson at the woman's excoriation, shrank appalled against the wall of the cabin.

"I hate you, *orang blanda*," Koyala hissed in a low

voice. "I hate you all. You are all false except one. And he is a fool. Woman, you are going to the city of Ah Sing. There you will learn how the *orang blanda* serves as slave, and the brown man as master."

With this last word she bolted out of the door, leaving Grace, white and gasping, to ponder on what she had heard.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE COMING OF LKATH

THE Javanese scouts whom Peter Gross sent into the town of Bulungan to act on Sachsen's suggestions did their work with a thoroughness which left nothing to be desired. About fifty thoroughly cowed and frightened natives of diverse tribes were herded into the fort under the direction of the efficient chief of scouts. Every one of them had a lively expectation of being either shot or suspended from the end of the rope. Their relief on being informed that all the *Orang Blanda Kapala* wanted was a little information was pathetic.

The news they contributed, however, was scant. None of them professed to have aught but the vaguest notion of where Ah Sing's camp was located. Some said it was three days' journey to the south, others reckoned it as much as ten days' journey. All were agreed that it was so cleverly hidden that no mortal man could find it unless specifically favored by the *hantu token* of that particular *negri*. Peter Gross was about to turn the whole crew out in disgust when Captain Carver called him aside.

"Do you see that dirty beggar in the corner?" the captain asked, pointing out a vile-looking Dyak clad in rags who had been making himself generally inconspicuous during the proceedings. "I couldn't place that fellow when I first saw him, although his face was familiar. But I have him ticketed now. That's the Kjai of Sibau, one of Ah Sing's lieutenants, and one of the most treacherous devils on the whole seacoast."

Peter Gross looked at the man fixedly. Noticing that he was under observation the native lowered his face.

"It's the kjai or his double," Peter Gross declared, his eyes lighting with recognition. He walked toward the figure.

Kjai," he asked, "have the fields of Sibau been swept by fire that thou art so poverty-stricken, or art thou under a vow?" The question was asked in Dyak.

Perceiving that further attempt at concealment was futile the kjai replied:

"I traded my garments with a beggar. Are not riches laid up in paradise for those who give alms?"

"Thou hast become exceedingly generous of late," Peter Gross returned dryly. "It has been reported to me that thou art overly fond of the fattest bullocks and heaviest grain in selecting thy portion of the crop."

The kjai scowled. His reputation for rapacity was too widespread to enable him to escape the charge and he realized the futility of argument. He waited therefore to hear what Peter Gross might offer or threaten.

"Kjai," the resident exclaimed sharply, "I know where you have been and why you returned here! You are a spy. By all the laws of war your life is forfeit. I offer you this alternative. Tell me where the *jonge juffrouw* is whom your people stole from here and where Ah Sing keeps himself, and I will let you go free. Otherwise, you will be food for the vultures."

The Malay drew himself to his full height.

"You may kill me, *orang blanda*," he spat venomously, "but the Yellow Spider will avenge my death."

Peter Gross turned to a sergeant.

"Take this man to the guard-house and hold him till I want him," he directed. The sergeant saluted and stepped forward.

The kjai sprang out of reach of the sergeant's extended hand. "No *orang blanda* rope shall defile me!" he cried in shrill defiance. From some hiding-place in his filthy rags which those who had searched him and

overlooked he drew a knife and with a rapid movement disemboweled himself. He sank to the floor, contorted with agony. His eyes were glazing as Peter Gross leaned over him.

The sergeant stooped to pick up the knife.

"Look out," Captain Carver warned, "it may be poisoned." Violet marks on the blade showed the captain was right. The steel had been dipped in the deadly juice of the upas-tree.

Sick at heart, Peter Gross ordered the room cleared and the corpse carried away. His anticipations of an easy victory had vanished. He knew now the grim desperation of the malcontents, rebels, and freebooters who were herded under the standard of Ah Sing.

Sachsen came in with the governor-general. The old man was as depressed as the resident. But Van Schouten's eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

"A good morning's work, *mynheer*," he complimented. "One of the devils gone. A bad one, too, or he would not have taken his own life."

"We haven't gained what we sought," Peter Gross pointed out.

"Then we'll beat up the jungle ourselves a bit, eh, *mynheer*?" the governor inquired cheerfully. "*Donder en bliksem*, I feel as if I were young again. We have good scouts. The Javanese are to be trusted. 'Twill be a strange thing if some of these *bruinevel* woodrats that live in the mud among the water hyacinths do not come to us willing to sell their souls for a *stuiver's* worth of rice, or a pot of Kawan oil."

The door opened unceremoniously. Captain Carver stepped inside.

"There's a procession of Dyaks coming in from the jungle," he announced. "The first man looks to me like Lkath."

"Lkath of the hill Dyaks?" Peter Gross cried incredulously.

"Yes."

"My blood brother!" the resident exclaimed. Without so much as a by-your-leave he fled the room and hastened to the gate.

The governor-general looked at Sachsen, and Sachsen at the governor-general. A mighty frown gathered on his excellency's brow.

"*Nu*, Sachsen!" he exclaimed portentously. "It seems the company of a dirty Dyak is preferred by our resident to ours."

"He called him blood-brother," Sachsen pointed out. "He may be a valuable ally bringing news of the *jonge juffrouw*."

At the mention of Grace Coston the governor's frown relaxed. A twinkle appeared in his eyes.

"Well, Sachsen," he remarked, "I guess we have all seen the day when the smile of a certain maid meant more to us than our sovereign's favor. You and I are a pair of old cocks ready for the block, Sachsen. The world is leaving us behind."

With a jaunty perk of his shoulders which belied his words the governor sallied forth to satisfy his curiosity concerning the arrivals.

There were ten Dyaks in the advancing group. Peter Gross met them at the gate. As he and Lkath met there was a simultaneous greeting of "*Salaamat!*" They stepped forward and rubbed noses, Peter Gross bending to put himself on a level with the redoubtable little chieftain of the hills.

The other chiefs and kjais were greeted similarly. Peter Gross knew them all. They were all loyal hill Dyaks and friends of Lkath.

"It has come to our ears that the Yellow Spider is spreading a net for thee. We have come to offer our aid," Lkath announced simply.

"I knew that when the word was brought thee, thou wouldst come, blood-brother," Peter Gross responded. "Was it Koyala who brought thee word?"

Lkath hesitated. "The Argus Pheasant has not been



in the country of my tribe for many moons," he replied.

Peter Gross sensed an evasion. He knew Lkath's loyalty to himself, but he also knew the chief's reverence for the priestess. Lkath would not betray Koyala. That he knew her whereabouts was probable, and that he did not disclose it was ominous. It could only mean one thing—Koyala had gone over to the camp of the enemy.

"Come within," Peter Gross invited. "His Excellency, the great white father of Batavia, is here. I want you to meet him."

Until late that night Peter Gross, Captain Carver, and the hill Dyak chieftain, Lkath, studied their strategy. Lkath stated that he knew the location of Ah Sing's lair, and, although he could not point it out, since a map was unintelligible to him, he gave his auditors an approximate idea of its whereabouts. He described in particular the difficulties of access, since the city stood in the midst of a vast jungle-walled swamp, traversed by only a few roads, all of which were easily defended.

"A hard nut to crack," Captain Carver observed. "We've got to blockade the coast, so that they can't make an escape by sea. That will be up to the gunboats. Then we've got to hammer our way in there in some way."

"In the mean time what will become of Miss Coston?" Peter Gross asked.

"No harm, I hope. We're doing all we can to rescue her. If Koyala were still with us we might try *finesse*. But since she's joined Ah Sing all we can do is hunt him up and whip him."

Peter Gross's clear, gray eyes rested on the captain's.

"Captain," he said, "it may sound ridiculous, in the face of the facts, but I believe Koyala will be our ace yet. It certainly appears as though she has deserted us for the Chinaman. She may feel she has a reason.

But at the bottom Koyala is sound and true. When she thinks this all out we'll hear from her."

Carver smiled bitterly.

"I wish I had your sublime faith in human nature," he observed.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### AH SING NAMES HIS TERMS

**T**WO huge Tibetans, Ah Sing's slaves, brought Grace Coston into the dimly lighted room of the long house, where the Yellow Spider brooded and spun his webs. The Chinaman's eyes gleamed when he saw the beauty of his capture.

"This is the maid?" he asked gutturally, in the *lingua franca* of the East Indies.

"This is the maid," Koyala repeated. Having spoken she glided through the door.

The Chinaman regarded his prize fixedly. He was seated in the densest shadows. Two tapers, affixed to quaintly carved stands in the Chinese style, and flaring brightly, threw a yellow light upon Grace Coston's features. A screen kept their rays from Ah Sing. Thus all that Grace was able to perceive was a squat, monstrous shape, huddled in the shadows like a huge toad.

In the privacy of her cabin on board the proa, Grace had privately rehearsed her meeting with the pirate chief. She would be brave, she was resolved. She would show this scourge of the seas how an American girl could face danger without quailing. Despite Koyala's rather ominous declaration that she would learn in Ah Sing's city how the *orang blanda* served the yellow man as slave, she had no real fear of what might befall her. Her hypothesis was that Ah Sing had learned in some way, through his agents, that she was possessed of wealth and had sent out an expedition to capture her in the hope of gaining a large ransom. Confident that Peter Gross would ere long effect her rescue she

had decided to temporize and bargain with the Chinaman, and create delays until the resident should have time to act. Thus she had entered the room with an air of assurance and confidence that was almost jauntiness.

Moments passed, and Ah Sing continued his unblinking contemplation of his prisoner. Grace strove to return his stare, but it was difficult. All she could see was two faintly luminous orbs in the deepest darkness, orbs that glowed with a mild and unvarying iridescence. She felt rather than perceived his gaze fixed upon her, a bold and insolent gaze that seemed to search out every line of her person, and leave her naked and ashamed. A hot flush came to her cheeks, despite her effort to remain cool and collected, and her chin tilted proudly.

The silence was suddenly shattered by the same accents she had heard before.

"You him Peter Gross's wlfiee?" a voice sounded from the gloom.

"I am no man's wife," she retorted sharply.

Grace was not sure, but she thought she perceived the Chinaman's jowls expand with a grin.

"Him Peter Gross's swleetheart?" the deep voice rumbled again.

"Mr. Gross is merely an acquaintance," Grace returned, biting her lips to restrain her indignation.

The Chinaman considered this a moment. Grace felt his curious, appraising eyes upon her again, studying every line and feature, as though she were a horse on the block. A cold chill came upon her, the Chinaman was so dreadfully calculating. She recalled what she had heard of his ruthlessness, his indifference to every human consideration. She trembled.

"What ransom will you require?" she asked. Her own voice sounded strange to her. The words had come from her mouth unbidden, for she was eager to flee this place and rid herself of the Chinaman's loathsome presence.

"What ransom?" The words came slowly and gutturally. There was a significant pause. Grace felt those terrible eyes upon her, reading her very soul.

"You muchee pletty girl," the deep voice rumbled. "You worth big ransom. You worth ransom him Peter Gross's nails. Savvy?"

"Peter Gross's nails?" Grace echoed vaguely, wondering what the Chinaman meant. Recollection suddenly smote her with a sickening sense of dread—she recalled what the trader, Poggs, had said about Ah Sing's curious practice of preserving the nails of his victims as relics.

"Him finger-nails, him toe-nails," Ah Sing explained placidly. "You whitee him come to Padang Batu of Sabaya. Come alone. Savvy?"

"I'll never write such a letter," Grace gasped, her heart chilling with horror as she grasped what the Chinaman purposed.

There was a dreadful silence. Grace's pulses were beating like trip-hammers as she waited for the pirate chief's reply.

"Allee samee you whitee to-morrow," the Chinaman insisted blandly. "If Peter Gross no come for his wiffee, the harems of my people are empty."

Grace glimpsed his sardonic leer as he nodded to the two Tibetans. Without a word they grasped her arms and led her out. She had need of their support, for her limbs were giving way beneath her. They led her to a squalid room with a pallet of straw and unceremoniously thrust her in and bolted the door. One of them stood guard.

As the somber pall of night fell on the pirate city Grace rested on her knees on the rickety bamboo floor.

"O God, give me guidance, and wisdom, and strength," she prayed. "Let me die before I betray Peter Gross."

At the same moment a curious scene was being enacted on the deck of the Zuyder Zee. The trader, Jim Poggs, had stolen upon John Bright and Vincent Brady a moment before with the startling announcement:

"They've abducted Grace from Fort Wilhelmina. She's a prisoner in Ah Sing's house. One of the

Malays just told me—a chap I used to know at Blellang.”

He got no further. Vincent Brady, his face ashen-pale, had risen. John Bright grasped his coat, but was too late. With a cry like that of a cougar robbed of her young, Vincent sprang forward and dealt their Chinese guard a staggering blow in the body. The guard doubled and staggered back. Before he could recover Vincent had sprang over the rail into the dark waters of the lagoon.

There were at least a score of witnesses to his mad act. A hubbub arose, paper lanterns began wagging, and native seamen poured over the side into tambangans strung along the stern of the vessel. The swift craft darted in pursuit. A few moments later they began returning. One of them contained the limp and unconscious body of Vincent Brady. He had been struck over the head with a paddle.

Jim Poggs' prayer that he and the missionary be permitted to attend their wounded comrade was grudgingly granted by the captain of the guard, a kindly disposed Chinaman at heart, but much upset by the occurrence. As the missionary deftly wound a bandage about the lad's head Poggs looked into Vincent's dull eyes and reverently murmured:

“The damn fool! He can't swim a dozen strokes.”

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE PIRATES AT BAY

IT was an hour before dawn. A silence like that of vacant desert places or high mountain-tops lay upon the city that Ah Sing had built in a remote and sparsely inhabited sector of Bulungan Residency. The sleepy sentries yawned and shivered at their posts, looking from time to time toward the mysterious east, where the sun sprang full-panoplied each morning into the auroral sky, and scattered the miasmal vapors of the swamps with its ardent rays.

There was not a light in the entire encampment. Ah Sing was too cunning to betray his lair by a glow of lamps or open fires in the somber sky and forbade all street and canal illumination after the hours of night-fall. The rule was rigidly adhered to, for there was none so bold as to defy their terrible chief. Thus Dyak and Malay and Bajau and Bugi composed himself to slumber when night fell and slept the sleep of the just until dawn broke, with never a thought of compunction or remorse for ships looted and throats cut, and heads lifted on privateering expeditions.

At the long house, however, behind barred windows and doors, a waxen taper cast a faint illumination about a gorgeously decorated room in the Chinese style. It was Ah Sing's den, the room to which he retired when the cares of his administration became too burdensome and there was no longer joy in dispensing his swift and merciless justice or wreaking vengeance. Here, too, he plotted and planned and cast the nets which attracted and held fast the simple residents of Borneo and the offscourings of the five seas, men for the most part

who had made it too hot for themselves at home and hence sought other shores and new fields of depredation.

Ah Sing was plotting to-night. Sleep had refused to come to his eyelids. In imagination he already held Peter Gross prisoner. He beheld the resident before him, manacled, aye, heavily manacled, for a man of such prodigious strength was not to be trusted with hands free, Ah Sing knew from experience. He thought of what he would say to his prisoner, the gibes, the taunts, the jeers, words that would cut and lacerate this great, silent man's soul as pincing irons tore the flesh. He rubbed his fat palms in cruel anticipation.

Peter Gross would come, he was sure of that. The maid would draw him. White men were that way, heedless of danger, reckless beyond reason, where their women were concerned. He, Ah Sing, knew that. It was a good plan to get the girl first, and thereby attract the greater prize, as a fly is drawn to honey. Koyala's jealousy had made it easy for him, ridiculously easy. The Chinaman's huge jowls expanded with a grin as he recollected how the Argus Pheasant, in her mad jealousy, had deliberately played into his hands and thereby made it possible for him to get his grip on the man whom she loved with a despairing love that dared not seek expression.

The maid was fair, too, surpassingly fair. An aristocrat, he knew for he had seen her type venturing down the streets of San Francisco's Chinatown in the days when he sold chop suey, and litchi nuts, and other Chinese delicacies from a little shop in the heart of the district. They had their mannerisms and ways, which even a careless eye might detect—a suppleness of body, a gracefulness, and a dainty avoidance of all that soiled, which the women of no other class or race possessed. She would be a jewel in his harem.

The Chinaman stopped short. A thought had occurred to him. If Peter Gross loved her, if he flew to her rescue and fell into the trap set for him, would not his anguish be multiplied a thousandfold if she were



dishonored and tortured before his very eyes? A look of fiendish malignancy and exultation overspread the Chinaman's features. His ready imagination pictured the scene—the white girl bound, the torturers punishing her tender flesh, and Peter Gross forced to look on helplessly in chains. A thrill of savage pleasure shot through him. The lust for cruelty of his Tartar forebears had its recrudescence in their perverted descendant. Aye, Ah Sing reflected, to torture the girl in Peter Gross's presence would be a refinement of pain exceeding any carnal pleasure that could be enjoyed by taking her into his harem. He chuckled gleefully.

The net was now ready, Ah Sing cogitated. The next step, therefore, was to snare the bird. Peter Gross was wary. But he had provided for that. To-morrow two chiefs would go, sea Dyaks whom he could trust and whose disloyalty was still unknown at Bulungan. They would bear a tale to the fort that could not help but draw the resident into the jungle if he loved his maid. After that it would be easy. It was so simple, Ah Sing complimented himself, yet so complete. In its very simplicity lay the assurance of success.

He carefully screened the taper and opened the blinds of a window toward the east. There was a faint grayish tinge on the horizon. The stars in that portion of the heavens had lost some of their brightness. Dawn was nearing, the dawn that would start runners speeding toward Peter Gross with the tale that was to bring him into the power of his arch-enemy, Ah Sing.

A face pressed against the window. Ah Sing drew back with a start of terror. A flash of contempt came over the features outside. They were a woman's.

"May I come in?" Koyala asked.

Ah Sing nodded toward the door. Summoning a sleepy attendant, he bade the man with curses to let the priestess in. A few moments later she glided along the corridor as silently and sinuously as a snake and entered his room. There was something, too, of the hyp-

notic malignant gleam of an angry cobra's eyes in her coal-black orbs as she looked steadily at the Chinaman.

"You are early," he grunted, watching her keenly as he sought to divine the purpose of this nocturnal visit.

"Night and day are as one to the Argus Pheasant," she replied. "Her ear is always open to hear what the winds tell her."

"What have the winds told you now?" Ah Sing asked bluntly.

"Is it true that Pagu and Lambutan leave this morning with a message for Mynheer Gross?" she demanded.

He surveyed her grimly. Some gabbing fool had betrayed his secret. He had not intended she should know until Peter Gross was actually a prisoner in his hands, then he could laugh at either her pleas or threats, whichever course she might take. This made it awkward, as she could defeat his carefully matured plan if she so desired.

A sudden resolve came to him. If he was to rule as chief of the pirate island empire this woman must be tamed. No time was better than the present. His heavy jowls contracted with decision.

"It is true," he announced sternly. "They leave by my command."

"That was not a part of our bargain," she declared steadily.

"It is the will of Ah Sing," he asserted firmly, in an orotund voice that rarely failed to cause the heart of his Malay and Dyak adherents to quake.

"I do not want him harmed," Koyala replied with disarming mildness.

"He shall be judged when he stands before me," Ah Sing replied.

"But I greatly fear he will not stand before thee as a prisoner," Koyala replied.

The yellow face of the Chinaman turned a malignant purple. With eyes flashing anger he cried:

"Woman, thou art holy to thy people, but do not attempt to cross me. I will crush thee like a beetle! Thou knowest the length of my arm."

Koyala smiled contemptuously. "I know the length of your arm, Ah Sing, and you know my power," she replied scornfully. "I have not crossed you or betrayed you. Nevertheless, I assert that Pagu and Lambutan will not leave here to-day for the *orang blanda* stronghold."

The significance of her tone impressed him more than the words. He looked at her questioningly. Something in her face caused his heart to constrict suddenly. A pallid dawn of fear came upon his features.

"What do you mean, Koyala?" he demanded sharply.

"Does the tiger leave its stricken mate?" she asked. "I mean this. Peter Gross is at your gates. If you wish to escape, come with me. But the *orang blanda* maid goes with us, too," she added viciously. "If you refuse to take her I refuse to show you the path by which alone you can escape."

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE PIRATES AT BAY—*Continued*

**A**T the base of a gently sloping elevation, where it drops into the alluvial slough of a sluggish and unnamed stream, Peter Gross halted his little army. The night was pitch-black around them. They had come many weary leagues through thick and impenetrable jungle during the preceding eighteen hours, but not a man of the little command murmured or asked for a bivouac. There was stern business before them, they knew, and they lusted with all a fighter's keen hunger for the fray, to come to grips with Ah Sing and his crew.

There was a little clearing at the edge of the swamp. In single file the troopers came out of the jungle, springing lightly on the soft turf in spite of their leg weariness. They were hot within, for the abduction of Grace Coston had stirred every man to his inmost depths and roused a savage resolve for rescue and vengeance on the perpetrators.

"She said to me only yistiddy: 'Meester McCoy, do you find Sumatra tobacco as palatable as the Virginia grown at home?' one of Captain Carver's irregulars related. 'Faith, mees,' I says, 'I'm just dying for the taste of a bit of home-grown weed.' 'I'll send you a box of it, a big box, the moment I get home,' she says. And now those devils have stolen her. By the howly St. Patrick, I'd march to hell itself to get her."

This was the spirit of the entire command, a spirit that had sustained them in their wonderful march from

Bulungan to the gates of Ah Sing's city in less than eighteen hours' time.

As they came into the open Peter Gross counted them. There were only a hundred and fifty men all told, a small force to pit against the renegades from half of East India. But Peter Gross counted on surprise and the spirit of his men. He knew that nothing short of death itself would stop them, and he doubted whether the panic-stricken pirates, awakened from a sound sleep, would put up much of a fight.

Captain Carver materialized out of the gloom.

"All here?" he asked in a low voice.

"The sergeants report every man present," Peter Gross affirmed.

"Lkath and his Dyaks and the Javanese under Lieutenant Van Voort will enter the swamp by the north trail at the first faint streak of dawn," Carver announced. "We take the east trail. There's no other way in or out of the town except by sea, Lkath says, and the Prins Lodewyk has them bottled up there. To the west across the river the morass is so deep nothing can get through it."

"Then we've got him," Peter Gross observed grimly. He wiped the cold sweat from his brow and looked anxiously toward the eastern horizon, star-dotted and faintly luminous.

"Fifteen or twenty minutes yet before it starts to dawn," Carver observed, guessing his leader's thoughts.

"About that," Peter Gross agreed. He looked pensively into the somber morass, alive with queer gurgling and nocturnal noises, the tweet and twitter of the birds, the buzz of myriad insect life, the scurrying of rodents, and the quaking of miry pools as gas generated in their slimy depths ascended to the surface. "I've waited a long while for this," he murmured prayerfully. "I hope we can end all this trouble and burden to-night."

"By taking Ah Sing?" Carver inquired.

"By taking Ah Sing," Peter Gross assented gravely.

"With him eliminated we can have peace. Peace and rest—and a change of scene."

Captain Carver looked at him curiously.

"You're thinking of leaving Bulungan for a time if this works out satisfactorily?" he asked.

"Aye," Peter Gross assented. "I think I'll leave *Insulinde* for a time. I want to go home, to America. I want to see a city again, white people like ourselves, captain, talking the same language, thinking and feeling the same things. I've been away a good many years, captain. I think I am a bit lonely for my native land."

Carver tugged at his chin silently, and gazed toward the city that Ah Sing built, hidden behind the swamp. The thought that came to him was this: "The girl's there, and the chap she's pledged to marry. She doesn't love Peter Gross, she only admires him, and that probably means she loves the other chap. There's a sad hour coming for you, Peter—I'm sorry for you."

But of this he said nothing. His only observation, quietly made, was: "It's beginning to lighten in the east. I think the guides should start."

The splendor of a tropic sunrise, streamers of copper and gold flaring to the zenith, was just beginning to appear in the heavens when a sleepy picket at the village gate leaped to his feet as he saw a khaki-clad figure spring out of the jungle and run toward the stockade. The next moment the first shot was fired and the picket, a tall Malay, fell headlong with a queer gurgle into a clump of cogon grass. With a ringing cheer, Carver's command, his own irregulars in the van, rushed toward the flimsy stockade. It was not built to resist a determined foe, for Ah Sing had not dreamed that he would ever be attacked in his own citadel. He deemed it too securely hid. There was nothing, therefore, to restrain Carver's men from swarming over it and into the streets of the city.

The amazed pirates, leaping to the doors of their houses, were greeted by a murderous fire. Half of

them weaponless except for their krises and spears, lost precious moments looking for their rifles. In this way Peter Gross's forces established a secure foothold in the town before the enemy made any attempt to resist them.

The pirates were of fighting stock. They were a breed sprung from lawlessness and existent only because of a superior tenacity in clinging to life. Moreover they knew what defeat meant. Consequently they quickly rallied. Leaderless, each man fought for himself and the inviolability of his own dwelling. Some had rifles, some had muskets, and some had only bows and arrows or sumpitans, but they fought stubbornly and with a heroism worthy of a better cause until a bullet found them.

In the face of such opposition the wedge that Carver sought to drive into the city to divide his foes in two and press them against the swamp and the river made slow progress.

His forehead bloody from a Dyak spear that had creased the skin as he shot one foe and stabbed another, Carver made his way toward where Peter Gross was leading a section of the attack.

"If we don't move faster than this they may get the cannon they've got on Ah Sing's yacht in action against us," he shouted hoarsely amid the din of conflict.

A few hundred yards ahead of him Peter Gross saw the long house, Ah Sing's residence, standing in the midst of an open square.

"Yonder's where the Yellow Spider sits and spins his webs," he roared to the men around him. "Who goes with me to drive him out?"

A wild yell greeted him. Twoscore men, grimed with perspiration and blood from minor flesh wounds, leaped forward at his cry. They swept down the lane in an irresistible tide. The pirates met them with rifle and spear and kris, but for once the ferocity of the Malay and Dyak freebooter was surpassed. Shoot-

ing, bayoneting, and clubbing their way through, with the giant form of Peter Gross at the apex of their wedge, they bored a hole through the ranks of their foes and reached the dwelling of the pirate leader.

At that moment there was a sudden volley and shrill cheer from the opposite end of the town. Van Voort and his Javanese, delayed through the inexplicable non-arrival of Lkath and his Dyaks, had finally arrived and taken the pirates in the rear. From the seacost a mile distant came the heavy rumble of naval guns.

Panic-stricken at this flank attack, disorganized, and dismayed at the inexplicable disappearance of their leader, Ah Sing, the pirates broke and fled toward the harbor. Some of them sprang into their proas and tambangans and paddled desperately down the river. Others plunged into the stream, preferring death by drowning to death at the hands of the hated *orang blanda*. Taking instant advantage of the break Carver and his men pressed them hotly, ferreting the snipers out of the houses as they went along. Broken groups made a last, desperate, ineffectual stand on the edge of the morass and on the river bank and died fighting. By this time Van Voort's column had worked its way through from the other side of the city and joined Carver's forces. In less than an hour after the battle was begun all resistance had ceased and Ah Sing's citadel was in his arch-enemy's hands.

Peter Gross took no part in the fighting after the long house had been achieved. When the pirates broke he sprang toward the nearest door of Ah Sing's dwelling. It was a heavy teakwood affair, solidly constructed, and quite unlike the entrances to the customary Bornean dwelling. Peter Gross tried the latch and found it locked. Stepping back a few paces he hurled his weight against it. It groaned against the impact. Frantic at the delay he leaped again with increased impetus, employing all his remarkable strength. The door burst from its hinges and he staggered within.

Recovering instantly, he put himself in a posture of



defense. He was carrying a pistol in his left hand and a heavy naval cutlas in his right. The gloom was thick around him, for all the windows were barred and shuttered, and the only light came through the broken door.

"Grace?" he called in a high pitched voice that betrayed the anxiety and anguish that filled him. There was no reply.

He called again. The same stillness followed, the empty echoes of his voice mocking him. Outside the conflict raged. Those who had answered his call to win the long house were apparently under the impression that their leader was still with them, for none of them followed him inside the dwelling. He was quite alone.

He listened keenly. The darkness and the silence were ominous, menacing. It scarcely seemed possible that Ah Sing and all his household had taken flight.

Stepping forward cautiously he approached one of the windows. Tearing the shutters loose he let the light stream in. The room was vacant. It bore every evidence of having been hastily deserted.

"Gone!" he exclaimed bitterly. "He must have been warned. Somebody played traitor."

He went to the next room. Entering cautiously he made him way to the window and removed the blinds. It, too, was empty. The next room was evidently a kitchen. Rice slowly cooking over a brazier, a partially filled dish of fruit, and dough for cakes in a bowl on the table disclosed that the occupants had been interrupted as they were making their morning meal. The attackers had missed capturing Ah Sing by only a few moments.

Peter Gross had no thought, however, of the loss of his coveted prize. That Ah Sing had escaped meant nothing to him at that moment. The anguishing thought that filled him was: "Did Ah Sing take any prisoners with him? Is Grace still in his hands?"

Less cautious now he ran hastily from room to room,

hoping against hope that he might find the girl he sought bound and gagged in some out-of-the-way corner of the rambling dwelling. As he passed from one darkened room into the semi-twilight of another some instinct, his guardian angel perhaps, caused him to pause on the threshold. What inspired that pause he never knew, for there was no warning sound, not so much as a rustle. But as he hesitated a fraction of an instant on the threshold a great heavy Chinese sword flashed before his face and brushed his sleeve. The point bit deeply into the solid floor.

Thought and action were simultaneous with Peter Gross. Stepping back a pace he fired twice in the fraction of a second. As the sword stood quivering in the floor he leaped forward with his cutlass.

There was no need. With a curious exhalation of breath, like a spent child's tired sigh, one of Ah Sing's huge Tibetan guards slid awkwardly to his knees and dropped face down across the threshold. He shuddered and lay still. There was a crimson stain on his tunic where the bullet had passed through.

Satisfying himself that the man was dead and not shamming, Peter Gross entered the room. It was Ah Sing's reception parlor, where he met his guests and sat in council with his allies, the recreant Dyaks and Malays of Bulungan Residency. Stepping forward with extreme caution Peter Gross forced open a window, permitting the bright glare of the morning sun to illuminate the dark corners that had seldom seen sunlight.

The room was empty, like the rest. There were evidences here, also, of a hurried departure; an overturned candlestick, rumpled rugs, and chairs out of place. It was evident that the apartment had held but one occupant, and his spirit had just fled across the great divide.

Peter Gross stood by the body of the dead Chinaman a moment and gazed on the grotesque, distorted features. A peculiar, sickening sensation, akin to an acute

nostalgia, seized him. He perceived how near he had been to death and how Providence alone had intervened to save him. Placing the Tibetan at the door with orders to split the skull of the first man who came through it was Ah Sing's work, he was certain. He perceived the fiendish ingenuity of it. Ah Sing must have guessed that his arch-enemy, eager to rescue Grace Coston, would be the first to search the house.

To rid himself of this feeling of nausea and to quiet his nerves he began wandering aimlessly about the room. In a darkened alcove he noticed a wicker basket of Oriental pattern and design. There was a garment in it. He glanced at it with vague curiosity and leaped forward. It was the cape Grace had worn the morning she was abducted by the Dyaks.

As his hand was about to close on the garment a suspicious fullness about the folds caused him to draw away. He glanced at it doubtfully a moment and then went back and picked up one of the fallen candlesticks. Holding this at arm's length he gently brushed the garment away from him.

There was a sudden motion below. The ugly pear-shaped head of a cobra rose above the basket, its venomous fangs darting wickedly. With a sweep of his cutlas Peter Gross severed head from body and stepped back.

"I wonder if Ah Sing has any more surprise parties for me?" he asked himself in a voice that strove to be cheerful, but was hoarse and strained. The Chinaman's diabolical ingenuity that exercised itself with planning schemes like these for the assassination of a hated foe in the midst of peril tried his nerves.

Satisfying himself that no other poisonous creature lurked under the concealing folds of the garment he lifted it gingerly and gazed at it with furrowed brow. There was no longer any doubt that Grace had fallen into Ah Sing's hands. She had been in this house, a prisoner. She had been taken from there, presumably when its pirate master had gone. Beyond all question

of doubt she was still with him, his captive, to wreak vengeance on if he so desired. Ah Sing had left the cape as a message to the victor to taunt him with the empty mockery of his victory, to show Peter Gross that he still possessed the white man's heart's desire.

There was a noisy stampede of roughly shod men into the dwelling. "Are you here, *mynheer*?" a voice called.

Peter Gross turned sadly away, carrying the flimsy garment gently on his arm, as though it were a sentient thing. The boisterous crew of conquerors who had invaded the house silenced when they saw their chief and read the pain in his face. A moment later Captain Carver entered.

"Any trace of Miss Coston?" he asked quietly.

"None," Peter Gross replied despondently, "only this." He exhibited what he had found. "She has been here. But she was taken away."

"I think we may be able to find her if we can locate Lkath," Carver replied. "I've quizzed one of the Dyaks, and he told me Ah Sing and a white girl captive with a mixed company of Chinese and Malays fled across the river and entered the swamp on the other side just after daybreak. The white girl is evidently Miss Coston."

"Have the other prisoners been accounted for?" Peter Gross asked.

"They were on the Zuyder Zee, which is swinging at her moorings out in the lagoon. The Dyak tells me he understands they made their escape down-stream in a *tambangan* just after the alarm was sounded. If that's the case they'll probably be picked up by the Prins Lodewyk."

Peter Gross's chin squared grimly. "We must start pursuit at once," he declared. "Can't you find Lkath?"

"No. I can't understand where he disappeared. He didn't take any part in the fighting whatsoever, so far as I know. I doubt if he will be of much help. He told me there was no way of getting into the city

from the other side. But, of course, Ah Sing has the best guide in all Borneo."

"Who is that?" Peter Gross asked sharply.

"Hadn't you guessed?" Captain Carver coolly replied. "Our mutual friend, Koyala."

## CHAPTER XXXI

### A MAN'S DEVOTION

**W**HEN the first shot was fired John Bright was beside Vincent Brady's cot and was applying a fresh bandage about the young man's forehead. Brady had a bad cut above the temple, but the wound was not serious unless complications set in. These were always to be feared and guarded against in a tropic climate, the missionary's long experience had taught him. As the shot broke the morning stillness, both lifted startled heads and listened. The opening volley came almost immediately afterward; then the cheers of the white men as they stormed the stockade.

John Bright turned toward Vincent with face illumined.

"Peter Gross is here!" he cried exultantly. "Didn't I say he would come?"

He rose. "Just a moment, please, while I go on deck," he begged.

"I'm going with you," Vincent cried, leaping out of his cot.

"You must not," the missionary remonstrated. "Your wound."

"Hell!" Vincent exclaimed, unmindful whom he was addressing. But the exclamation failed to provoke the missionary. John Bright was too thoroughly a man not to understand human passion in great moments. They rushed on deck together.

The deck was deserted. Looking over the side of the ship, they saw their late guards rowing frantically down the lagoon. At the far end of the lagoon, where it emptied into a tortuous channel running to the

Celebes Sea, was a small proa with several figures aboard. One was a woman in European dress. Vincent gazed at her intently.

"My God, it's Grace!" he cried agonizedly. "We've got to follow." He ran up and down the deck excitedly, looking for a boat.

"There's a wabby old tambangan here, with two paddles in her," a voice announced from over the side. "She'll carry four. Can you get the lady?"

It was the trader, Jim Poggs. Vincent cast a single glance at the water to satisfy himself that there was a craft there, and fled below. By this time the fight was on in earnest in the city. Violet Coston, aroused by the uproar, had hurriedly dressed and was fastening her slippers when Vincent called her.

"Hurry," he shouted, "or we'll be too late."

"But I haven't combed my hair, Vincent," she remonstrated.

"Never mind your hair," he pleaded. "But do hurry; it's life or death."

Hearing this, she unbolted the door and rushed outside. They were on the deck a moment later. John Bright, with the air of a courtier, assisted her into the clumsy tambangan. Then he and Vincent in turn sprang into it.

Vincent picked up a paddle, but Poggs peremptorily took it from him.

"I'm captain of this craft," the trader announced belligerently. "You'll abide by my orders. And them orders is to set still and let them who know how to handle this here breed of cantankerous craft handle her."

He offered the paddle he had taken from Brady to the missionary and kept the other himself.

"Where away?" Bright asked quietly.

"Follow the proa," Vincent cried. The proa was at that moment disappearing in the channel.

"Shet up!" Poggs ordered peremptorily. To Bright he announced: "We'll head down-stream after the proa, as I say." Hearing this, Vincent subsided.

Clumsy as the tambangan was, it made good progress in the not inexpert hands of the trader and John Bright. The fighting was still intense when they entered the river. A ship's length ahead the channel turned. There was, of course, no trace of the proa.

Racing down-stream through a wilderness of tropic foliage, with many a crook and turn, they came after a brief half-hour's run to a fork in the channel.

"Which way?" Poggs asked as they drifted toward it. The two forks seemed to be of about equal size and taking an equal volume of water. Vincent gazed at them in an agony of indecision.

"We can only trust to chance," John Bright observed quietly.

"Then we'll take the left fork," Poggs announced. With a stroke of his paddle he sent the craft spinning in that direction.

They journeyed on for another ten minutes—hours it seemed to Vincent, who was eating his heart out. He had no word for his lovely companion, who gazed at him with sympathetic eyes. A great change had come over Violet Coston; misfortune had purged her of her fickleness and converted the spoiled child into a mature woman capable of realizing the major values of life. She knew what Vincent was thinking, and knew, too, that it was best that he be left alone with his anxiety and grief.

The channel suddenly narrowed through a dam of fallen trees. As Poggs spied this, he uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Confound it, we've come the wrong way," he exclaimed. He tried to arrest the progress of the tambangan, but it began spinning. Before he could stop the rotary motion it had run against the dam. Hardly had it touched the trees before half a score of nearly naked Dyaks, running out from the shore and dropping down from the overhanging branches, grasped the vessel.

Violet clung affrightedly to the missionary. She did not scream; danger had been too familiar in the



preceding few weeks to cause her to give vent to such a feminine display of feeling. But her blood ceased flowing, for she verily believed that the end had come.

A boyish figure in khaki sprang over a fallen tree on the edge of the shore and grinned at them.

"Hello!" he observed amiably, in perfect English.

"Hello yourself," Poggs retorted. "Will you call off your heathen and give us a hint on where we are?"

"This is part of Peter Gross's outfit," the youth explained. "My name is Paddy Rouse."

In her relief Violet gave vent to a burst of hysterical laughter that was half sobbing. The missionary patted her hand and whispered soothing words in her ear.

"Did you see a proa come through here?" Vincent cried. "A proa with Chinese aboard and a white lady prisoner?"

"Miss Coston?" the surprised youth exclaimed. "No, the proa hasn't come this way. The other is the main channel. If the proa went that way, the Prins Lodewyk will get her. She's lying off the entrance; those were her guns you heard a little while ago. But come ashore."

They accepted the invitation.

"How far is it to the seacoast?" Vincent asked. At this moment a pygmy Dyak warrior, evidently a chief by his trappings, stepped out of the jungle and spoke in guttural Dyak to Paddy Rouse. The latter listened attentively.

"Lkath tells me," he announced excitedly, "that the proa turned into a bayou nearly a mile above here and was left there. Ah Sing and all those with him, including Miss Coston, went into the swamp and are headed north."

"Then I must follow them," Vincent cried.

Rouse spoke to Lkath. The little Dyak shook his head in vigorous negation.

"Lkath says there is no trail," Paddy announced.

"If Ah Sing went that way, I'm going that way also," Vincent declared vehemently. "I'll follow him to the end of the world, if need be."

Paddy glanced at him curiously. "Your name Brady?" he asked.

"Yes."

"She told me about you," Paddy stated. Intensely loyal to what he deemed Peter Gross's interests, he added: "You'd better come with us and let Peter Gross find her."

The hot blood flamed in Vincent's face. "Thanks," he said in a soft voice that trembled in spite of his effort at self-control. "If you don't mind looking after my friends here, and bringing them to your resident, I'll start in search of Miss Coston myself."

John Bright spoke a word of remonstrance, but it was wasted. Before any one realized what Vincent purposed, he had leaped into the tambangan and swung the craft free. Exerting himself to the utmost, he headed it into the sluggish current.

"Come back, you'll get mired in the swamp," Paddy shouted.

"Come back!" Poggs roared.

"Come back!" John Bright cried imploringly.

"Vincent, come back," Violet Coston pleaded in a shrill treble that carried farther than any other voice.

But Brady was deaf to these cries. Wielding the paddle desperately, though awkwardly, he drove the heavy boat against the stream and widened the distance between himself and those he had left behind. The last they saw of him was when the tambangan rounded the point ahead.

"All we can do," Paddy observed, "is to get back to Peter Gross at once and report. We have no boats. Mynheer Gross will probably have to send out a rescue party."

Vincent was soon wearied. It taxed his utmost strength to drive the boat against the current, and the rising sun added to his discomfort. It seemed to him he had gone several miles, instead of the one mile Paddy had specified, before he discovered a rift in the jungle wall. Driving the tambangan through it, he perceived a bayou or lagoon ahead. At the upper end

lay a deserted proa, the very craft that had left Ah Sing's harbor a short time before.

Paddling desperately, he crossed the lagoon and ran alongside the proa. A hurried examination disclosed that there was no one aboard. The reeds on the shoreward side of the proa were trampled down, indicating that a large party had gone ashore. A plain trail led into the morass.

Vincent wasted no time on the proa. Although weaponless, he plunged boldly into the swamp. Winding around the mangroves, through sedges and tall clumps of cane, over fallen tree-trunks, into stretches of jungle where the thick-growing liana formed an almost impenetrable barrier, and among boggy dells where the deceptive soil disappeared under foot, the trail led steadily deeper into the primeval tropic wilderness. It was a land of mystery and silence, of nocturnal shades and ghostly rustlings that Vincent found. The air was heavy and oppressive. The unending morass quaked and groaned in titanic agony. Loathsome stench and clouds of pestilential insects rose from it. Great spiders lurking in their webbed warrens watched him struggling through the undergrowth, and little striped and spotted snakes glided across his path. Invisible presences seemed to tenant the brooding forest. Vincent thought at times he felt the brushing of their ghostly wings. In every thicket and in every clump of grass he suspected a lurking foe, and he kept looking fearsomely back lest a tiger stalk him unaware. Yet he pressed on.

The trail ended at the margin of a little stream. Vincent looked across and saw no break in the solid wall of mangrove-roots. Pads of water hyacinths fronted the trees. There was not a broken stem or torn leaf to mark the passing of a human. Up-stream and down-stream the same solid wall ran.

Vincent stared at it in despair. It was obvious that one of two things had occurred. Either the fleeing Ah Sing had entered the stream here to hide his trail by

water, or he and his party had left the trail by some fork which Vincent had passed by in his haste.

For a moment despair gripped the young man's heart. Whatever course he took, there were two chances to one that he would be in error. To become lost in the swamp meant certain death. But, worse than this, in Vincent's estimation, was the fact that if he missed the trail now, Ah Sing would escape into the interior with his precious prize.

He paused uncertainly on the brink of the stream. Which way should he go, up or down? He instantly rejected the alternative of going back to investigate whether Ah Sing and his party had left the main trail.

If the Chinaman was heading for the interior, it would be most logical to assume that he had gone upstream, Vincent reasoned. His decision was instantly made. Without a thought of the danger, and wholly forgetful that a tropic stream like this might harbor crocodiles or poisonous reptiles, he plunged into the water waist-deep and headed against the current.

As he waded along, sometimes only ankle-deep, sometimes through hollows where the water rose to his neck, and sometimes through muddy places where the treacherous mire gripped like a quicksand, he gazed anxiously at the passing banks for a sign of a break where human foot might have trod. But no such vestiges appeared. The somber, drooping swamp ran endlessly, the little streamlet turned and twisted into innumerable ox-bows, so that, although Vincent walked miles, sometimes on shore and sometimes in the water, he really made little progress.

Meanwhile the sun climbed steadily higher. The heat became intolerable. Not a breath of air stirred in the swamp, and the perspiration poured down Vincent's body. His throat seemed on fire, but he dared not drink the muddy, malarial waters of the brook. Great clouds of mosquitoes and flies settled on him, and, although he fought desperately, he could not ward them off. He grew dizzy with the heat, but struggled doggedly on.

From across the stream a colony of long-nosed apes

chattered saucily in the tree-tops. A mias, lurching on durian, paused at his midday meal to stare at the intruder, but decided gravely that he was not worth driving out of the domain. A python looked down from the branches of a huge banyan, blinked, and went to sleep again. It had eaten too recently to desire another meal. Overhead a passing vulture, inspecting critically the earth below, spied him, circled slowly, and commenced a series of empyrean evolutions bringing it gradually nearer to earth.

On a little knoll, in the shade of a clump of stunted marsh conifers, Vincent stumbled and fell and did not rise again. Exhausted nature could do no more. He had given his last ounce of strength. The flies and the mosquitoes swarmed over him. The vulture settled in a near-by tree, waiting until the stings of myriad insects and the increasing heat should write the final chapter in this oft-repeated tragedy of the Bornean swamps.

Thus Koyala found him.

The Argus Pheasant was returning after safely guiding Ah Sing and his party through the morass, when she spied the vulture settling to earth. Her quick ear caught the threshing of the tangled cane as Vincent labored stumblingly through. He had lain on the bank only a few moments when she, peering carefully through the tangled leafery, spied him. She came forward slowly.

"An *orang blanda!*" she hissed spitefully through set teeth when she approached. Her face darkened and she turned away, but paused irresolutely. Curiosity got the better of her hate, and she stepped slowly forward and gazed into his face. Her brow knitted.

"He is not one of Peter Gross's men," she observed to herself. "Where can he have come from?" A thought suggested itself to her: "I wonder if he was one of Ah Sing's prisoners? But what is he doing here?"

She brushed the flies and mosquitoes away, an instinctively feminine act and not due to an impulse,

for she felt no kindness toward this member of the hated white race. The mystery of his presence in the heart of the almost impenetrable morass roused her curiosity. Entering the forest, she returned a moment later with a large nepenthes. It held over a pint of pure, clear water, sweet and cool. Forcing open his lips, she let some trickle down his throat. The balance she permitted to run over his fevered forehead and temples.

Vincent gasped and opened his eyes. He struggled to rise, but fell back exhausted. He gazed vacantly at the somber, green foliage overhead and then turned toward Koyala. An interrogative light struggled to find expression in them.

"Where am I?" he gasped. He looked around uncertainly. "Oh, the swamp. But where's Grace?"

At the mention of her hated rival's name a tide of curious crimson flood rushed to Koyala's face. The spark of womanly sympathy that had been aroused in her at the plight of the helpless lad she had found fled on the instant. "So this is another of her victims," was her instant thought. "Let him die here in the woods; let the vultures and the flies quarrel over his remains."

Vincent, struggling to rise and resting on one elbow, looked eagerly at Koyala. "I'm looking for a lady, Grace Coston. She is a prisoner of the pirate, Ah Sing. Can you help me find her?" he implored.

"Why should I help you find her, *orang blanda?*" Koyala inquired harshly in excellent English.

A light of understanding came upon Vincent's face. "You are the Argus Pheasant," he cried. "You can help me. Help me, I beg you, help me find her!"

"Why do *you* want to find her?" Koyala demanded cynically.

"Because she is my promised wife," Vincent replied.

Koyala started. Her keen, coal-black eyes searched the young man's face. It was a clean, honest, boyish face, revealing character, a bit self-willed, perhaps, and a bit haughty, but not too spoiled to mend. It ex-

pressed absolute candor and sincerity, and there was a beseeching look in the eager eyes that tugged sharply at the priestess's heartstrings.

"Grace Coston will wed the Resident of Bulungan," she answered in a dry, matter-of-fact tone.

Vincent glanced at her in surprise. "Grace Coston will marry me," he returned firmly.

"Grace Coston will marry Peter Gross if she escapes Ah Sing," she repeated. "But she will not escape Ah Sing," she declared, an exultant tone in her voice betraying her.

Vincent struggled gamely to his feet. He tottered weakly, and clung to the low branches of the pines for support. The vulture rose regretfully from a neighboring tree and flew away.

"That is an untruth, because Grace Coston will marry me," he asserted tensely. "And I will save her from Ah Sing."

Koyala's lips curved with scorn.

"Do you think you could take her away from Ah Sing and those who are with him, *orang blanda?*" she asked contemptuously. "You have neither the strength nor the wit to find your way out of this swamp."

Vincent pulled himself together bravely. "I will find a way," he declared. "If you will not help me, priestess, I must go alone."

He stepped forward uncertainly a few paces. Letting go the branches of the screw-pines, he labored across the narrow clearing. Twice in that space he lifted his hand dazedly to his head. As he approached a clump of sedges his foot caught in a projecting root and he fell heavily. The swarm of flies and insects gathered around him again.

Koyala, who had been watching him, waited uncertainly a moment. Her hatred of the white race and all its members had never been so keen. She believed them all faithless, cruel, thinking only of self. It lay within her heart to revenge herself for injuries done her from the moment of her conception to this day by white men, for insult and contumely suffered in silence, for

neglect and silent scorn, by plunging a dagger into the heart of this young man and leaving him there. Had it not appeared that the sun and the insects would save her adding his death to her account, she might have done so, she felt.

Yet he made a powerful appeal upon her. He loved this smooth-skinned, white-faced maid, this fickle jade who had twisted Peter Gross around her finger like the basket-maker twists his reeds, who had made him foolishly dream of leaving Bulungan and following her across the water. Aye, he loved her, or he would not follow her thus, when exhausted nature could do no more.

He said she was his promised wife. Koyala pondered on that statement. Peter Gross had spoken the truth, then; there was a prisoner in Ah Sing's camp to whom this maid had promised herself in marriage. Perhaps she loved him, too, but being white was fickle, and turned the heart of every man with whom she came in contact. White women were that way, Koyala knew; they did not love with the single-heartedness and intensity of the women of Borneo.

If the white woman loved this man and married him she could not wed Peter Gross. On the other hand, it was safer to leave her in Ah Sing's hands—

"Water," Vincent moaned, stirring slightly.

As she heard that pitiful plea, Koyala's doubts and irresolution vanished in an instant. The eternal womanhood that was in her responded to the cry of human misery, and every other consideration was forgotten. Hurriedly getting another pitcher-plant, she again chased the noxious insects away and helped him to drink.

As he struggled to rise she bade him to remain still, and gave him a portion of a palm-leaf with which to keep the insects away. Without stating what she was doing, she constructed in an incredibly short space of time a crude shelter where he could rest in comfort.

"But I can't wait—I must go on," Vincent expostulated when he perceived her intention.



"You must rest until after the siesta-hour," Koyala declared inexorably. "An hour before sundown we shall leave here. I will guide you out of the swamp and to Ah Sing's camp. We will rescue the woman you love together. You cannot do it; I can. Therefore you must do as I direct."

The morning's struggle through the morass had eradicated all of Vincent's headstrong obstinacy and stubbornness. He knew the limit of his powers; so that what Koyala saw was a boyish smile of willing resignation.

"I am your dutiful servant, princess," he declared.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE ARGUS PHEASANT REDEEMS HERSELF

**B**ORNE in a closely covered palanquin by six husky bearers, Grace experienced little of the discomforts of the wearisome journey through the swamps. It was insufferably hot inside the stuffy little box, and the swarms of mosquitoes necessitated keeping the curtains closed, but Grace was only dimly aware of how the cavalcade struggled knee-deep in mire, crossing sloughs, and cut its way through almost impenetrable jungle.

At the ford Koyala had led Ah Sing and his party down-stream, instead of up, knowing there was higher ground below. This is how it happened that Vincent missed the trail and became lost in the trackless morass.

Grace knew that Koyala was their guide. She caught a glimpse of the priestess as they left Ah Sing's house in the faint, gray dawn. She saw her again when they left the proa to enter the swamp. The presence of the half-white, half-Dyak girl gave her confidence. From the brief acquaintanceship she had with Koyala she intuitively felt that the latter would not resign her to an awful fate with Ah Sing. This conviction was strengthened by reflection as she recalled innumerable evidences of Koyala's native purity of heart as revealed in sundry expressions and mannerisms which the feminine eye alone can read and understand.

When late in the afternoon they reached a deserted village, and a Chinese guard roughly bade her come out of the palanquin, Grace, therefore, looked around for their fair guide. But Koyala was not to be seen. At first Grace thought that the priestess had left the camp temporarily and would return. But when the

shadows began to thicken and there was no sign of her, fear began to grip Grace's heart for the first time that day.

Upon Ah Sing's instructions she was thrust into a vacant hut and a Chinaman stationed at her door. Fortunately he knew a little English. Grace asked him where Koyala had gone.

He shrugged his shoulders. "No tellee," he grunted. "She-um Koyala go 'way bimeby big piece back in woods."

Grace's face became ashen pale. She was alone, then, and at the mercy of this band of savages. The thought stunned her. Terror welled in her heart, and she shrank into the darkest corner of the hut. At every footstep passing by she trembled.

As night came on, lights began to appear in the camp. Ah Sing evidently deemed himself safe from pursuit. But there was no light in Grace's hut. She sat in darkness on the floor of the dwelling, the prey of an unending nightmare.

When the night advanced the fires died down and the pirates stretched themselves on reed mats and went to sleep. But sleep was far from Grace's eyes. She listened with quaking heart to every sound. The mysterious voices of the nocturnal jungle called to her, the crickets, and the night birds, and the wind sighing through the tops of the coco-palms. A leopard called, a long, quavering cry like a child shrieking for its mother, and Grace shivered in dread. In a near-by stream she heard the crocodiles splashing.

It was past midnight when drowsiness finally began settling upon her tired eyelids. They dropped lower despite her effort to keep awake. Like a tired child she finally sank to rest on one of the foul mats that covered the floor of the hut.

A sensation akin to an electric shock suddenly caused her to bolt upright from a deep sleep and gaze around affrightedly. She thought she had felt the touch of a human hand upon her own. Rigid, and every sense acute, she waited and watched and listened.

"Are you awake?" a sibilant whisper sounded close to her ear.

"Koyala!" Grace gasped in excess of relief.

"S-h!" the voice cautioned. "The guard may hear you. Can you follow me without making any noise?"

"Yes," Grace whispered breathlessly.

"Hurry, then. We have no time to lose."

Grace perceived that a small aperture had been cut in the rear of the hut. There was a rustle, then a human form obscured the dim patch of light. It disappeared almost instantly, gliding through the opening as sinuously as a snake. Grace followed, holding her breath lest she be heard.

As she merged into the open, Koyala grasped her hand and pulled her into the shadows. The priestess waited a moment, listening intently, then stepped warily around the hut. There were several others, standing in a row, and she led Grace around the rear of each of these. At the end of the lane a low fire was burning and a Dyak squatted before it, with his spear between his legs. His back was turned toward them.

With a finger of warning upon her lips Koyala led Grace stealthily around the edge of the dangerous zone of light to a clump of shrubbery.

"On your hands and knees now," she directed. Grace obeyed. They crawled in this way for several rods, till they gained the shelter of a thicket. Koyala rose and plunged boldly in the somber forest, black as the interior of a mining-shaft. Stifling her doubts and her fear, Grace followed.

When they were some distance from the camp, Koyala led Grace into a little glade where the moonlight was playing hide-and-seek through the treetops.

"There is a question I must ask you," the priestess declared, confronting the girl she had rescued. "Is it true that in Ah Sing's camp there was held as prisoner a young man whom you are to marry?"

"Yes. Was he saved?" Grace asked anxiously.

Koyala paused. She waited until the moonlight fell upon Grace's face, and then announced abruptly:

"He is here. He is waiting for you."

"Vincent here?" Grace cried rapturously. "Where?"

The foul suspicion that had blighted Koyala's life since she first saw Grace Coston's face fled at the sound of that cry. She gazed at Grace incredulously for a moment, as though unable to conceive that any woman could prefer another before Peter Gross, but the girl's joy-illuminated features scattered every doubt. The sullen distrust, the rancor, and the hatred that had soured her existence for days disappeared from her heart. Her eyes moistened. A sense of guilt and shame at the hardship and misery she had caused this frail member of her sex smote her. She burned with eagerness to make amends. The transition from distrust to loyalty, from hate to affection, took place in a moment's time, before Grace could repeat her question.

"A few steps farther," Koyala cried, grasping Grace's hand and pulling her forward in her own eagerness to reunite the lovers. They walked less than a hundred yards, when they came to the bank of a small streamlet. Koyala uttered the weird and peculiar cry of the Argus pheasant. A form detached itself from the gloom.

"Grace?"

"Vincent!"

They were in each other's arms. Their lips met in a long-denied kiss. He crushed her to his breast, she clung to him passionately. Koyala turned aside, eyes smarting with tears. Her sense of guilt flayed her like a lash.

"We must hurry," she announced finally, interrupting their love-making. "Ah Sing will find Miss Coston missing at dawn. He will send men in pursuit. They will overtake us unless we hasten, for you cannot travel swiftly through the forest as I do."

"Lead the way, *juffrouw*," Vincent announced. "We will try to keep pace with you."

Dawn found them in the midst of the jungle, but half-way to Ah Sing's city, where Peter Gross and his forces remained encamped. Grace was exhausted. The

strain of the last few days, coupled with the fact that she was neither dressed for nor accustomed to jungle travel, told on her cruelly. Her arms and hands were torn and bleeding from contact with thorns and briars. Vincent was in little better shape, for he had not yet recovered from his exhausting experiences of the morning. Koyala perceived their condition.

"We cannot go farther," she announced quietly. "It is impossible for us to reach Mynheer Gross before our pursuers overtake us. We must hide. There is a ruined temple-tower near by; it was built by the Mongol conquerors who came here ages ago, so long ago that none of my people know aught of their stay in this land except the chief priest. My grandfather Chawantangi told me the story of this tower and showed me how one man can hold it against a hundred. We must tarry there until rescue comes."

"We are in your hands, *juffrouw*," Vincent replied. Koyala started, wondering that he should speak so much like Peter Gross. They were largely cast in the same mold, she decided. But Peter Gross was by far the greater character.

The tower was a masonry structure, about thirty feet high. Where the bricks came from, and what story they might have told, was a thought that occurred to Vincent as they approached the building, but he dismissed it for a more convenient season. The jungle grew thickly around it, the creepers and vines crawling through the open door and up the stairway, fastening their tendrils into the decaying rubble. Before she permitted them to approach it, Koyala lifted the vines aside and drove a family of vipers out of their nest in a pile of fallen bricks.

With Vincent assisting her, Grace made her way up the ancient stair. The bricks were worn in the center. Myriads of naked feet had trod those stairs in other centuries to offer gifts to unknown gods. The race and religion had both vanished, leaving only a lone tower buried in the jungle.

The stair seemingly ended in a ceiling. But as

Koyala, who was in advance, came within reach of the ceiling, she pushed upward. A flag of stone began to revolve, opening the way for them. Koyala went above.

"There is naught here but some nests. You may come up," she announced. Vincent and Grace followed her. They found themselves in a small room about ten feet square. There were two small circular openings in the wall that served as windows.

"We may have to hide here for several days," Koyala announced. "I shall get fresh water and food."

She disappeared and came back a little later with several pitcher-plants. Vincent offered to assist, but she sharply directed him to remain where he was. He was in nowise loath. Grace and he had a thousand things to talk about, and they improved their opportunity.

On her next trip Koyala brought with her coconuts, plantains, durians, and breadfruit. She left again, but was absent only a short time.

"Silence," she warned. "Ah Sing is coming. I saw the Dattoo Njam only a moment ago crossing the stream a little below here."

Grace's hand crept fearsomely toward Vincent. His palm closed over it.

"I am afraid they heard your voices," Koyala whispered regretfully. "Sounds from this tower carry a long way. I should have warned you, but I did not think they were so near. Ah Sing must have discovered that you were gone before sunrise, Miss Coston."

"How can we defend ourselves?" Vincent asked.

"I have my dagger," Koyala responded. "I shall sit by the stone. Those that try to enter will die."

"Let me take it," Vincent asked. "It's my place."

Koyala's lips curled scornfully. "You forget that I am a daughter of the jungle, *mynheer*," she replied. "Hush!"

They heard a low, rustling sound below. Someone was coming through the liana and cane toward the

tower. They waited breathlessly. Koyala quietly glided toward the stone and squatted next to it.

A murmur of guttural voices came to their ears. The dialogue was unintelligible to Vincent, but he perceived from Koyala's face that those below were debating the advisability of investigating the tower. Presently other voices joined in the dialogue. Then they heard a sharp order in deep, guttural tones. Grace shivered.

"Ah Sing," her eyes said to Vincent. He pressed her hand reassuringly.

Someone began mounting the stair warily, a step at a time. He prodded the stone flag with his spear. Koyala held it in place by the simple expedient of sitting on it. Satisfied, the pirate retreated and reported to his chief.

There was a torrent of guttural abuse from Ah Sing. At his command three of his followers mounted the stairway and strove to budge the stone. Their united effort was unsuccessful, for Vincent had added his weight to Koyala's. The stone gave slightly under the impact of their blows, however, revealing that it was being held in place by someone above.

There was a satisfied grunt from those below as this fact was established, and they hastily decamped and reported to Ah Sing. An interval of waiting followed. Vincent stole to the window and peered out.

"They're getting a log to use as a battering-ram," he announced excitedly. Koyala nodded. She indicated to Vincent that he take her place beside the stone for a moment. When he did so she stole to the window and glanced out.

"They are all Malays and Chinese," she announced disappointedly as she returned. "I had hoped that there would be some of my people among them. They would have listened to me."

She took her place again beside the stone and waited. The minutes dragged by. The Dyaks were evidently taking their time, and believed they had their prey securely bagged.



There was a crashing at last of a heavy object pulled through the cane. The creepers were pulled away below and the length of log placed on the stairway. The pirates were making no secret of their intentions and took no precautions to conceal their movements. Several of the strongest finally seized the log and hurled it against the stone flag. It gave way instantly, for Koyala's weight was no longer above it, and the log shot through. Expecting resistance, the pirates were wholly unprepared for this. They let go the log to save themselves from falling. As it fell back it rolled them down the stairs like so many ninepins. Bruised and limping, and uttering fierce curses in every language of the Malay Archipelago, they walked away.

A storming party instantly took their places. Led by the Dattoo Njam, they leaped up the stairway. As the datoo's head rose above the level of the floor he saw the priestess Koyala sitting on her knees with uplifted dagger. Even as he recognized her the dagger shot forward like a snake's fangs and pierced his temple. He fell back without a groan.

There was a yell of anger from the pirates. The next man clutched at the figure sitting above and received a thrust through the hand. Uttering an oath, he let go and dropped. The third was warier and shot a spear through, but Koyala was prepared for this maneuver and dodged the steel point. At the same time she ripped the pirate's arm open from shoulder to wrist. The pirates paused, and the stone slipped back into place.

Koyala was breathing hard, but her eyes were dancing. The fierce joy of conflict was upon her. In defending Grace and Vincent she felt she was making amends for the suffering she had caused them.

The pause was only momentarily. The stone suddenly lifted and three spears shot through. Before Koyala could draw back one of them penetrated her shoulder. Those below caught their first glimpse of

her. A fierce shout—"The Bintang Burung"—rent the air.

"Pull her down, drive a spear through her!" Ah Sing yelled, mad with rage at what he deemed her treachery. "Are you all afraid of one woman? Hing Ho, go in there and pluck that she-devil down from her perch for me. Go!"

The big Chinese guard who was addressed sprang up the stairway. Thrusting his sword upward unexpectedly, he drove it into Koyala's side. A low moan of pain came from her, and she partially collapsed. A huge yellow claw reached through to pull her down.

Chafing under inaction, Vincent saw what was occurring. Leaping forward, he caught the Chinaman's hand and gave it a sudden backward wrench. The Chinaman was unprepared and toppled backward. At the same instant Koyala rallied and pulled herself together.

"Let me take your place," Vincent pleaded. Her face was deathly pale, an olive paleness, but she smiled bravely and shook her head in negation.

Vincent spied a chipped piece of rock weighing about four pounds in the dust in one corner. Inspiration came to him, and he leaped forward and seized it. When he turned two spears were threatening Koyala and two Malays reached out to drag her down. As she drove her dagger into the face of one, slitting his cheek open, Vincent drove his rock into the other's features, crushing them in. Both Malays dropped back. Vincent instantly turned the stone on its pivot and threw his weight on it.

"You are wounded," he said. Koyala's sarong was stained with blood.

"It is not serious," she negatived faintly.

"We must surrender or you will die! You need help!" he cried. He tried to lift the stone, but she placed her knee on it.

"I forbid!" she cried. "Do you think they will help me? They will leave me here to die! They are not my people."

Vincent hesitated. In the pause Grace stole to the window.

"They are bringing up reeds and brushwood!" she cried in warning. Koyala's face became still paler.

"They mean to smoke us out!" she exclaimed.

"Will the smoke come through?" Vincent asked. She nodded affirmatively.

"Had we better give in now?" he inquired.

"Is it your desire?" she asked.

"Personally—no. There is always a chance."

"We will wait," she replied simply.

There were no more rushes. The Malays piled brushwood and reeds on the stairs. Presently they heard the crackling of flames. A puff of smoke came through the interstices between the flag of stone and the masonry. It was quickly followed by another.

The Malays threw a blanket of damp marsh grass on the flames. The thick smoke bellied upward and poured through the cracks.

"This is the end," Vincent coughed, half-strangled.

There was a ringing cheer outside. Indistinguishably mingled with it was a savage yell of dismay. Almost at the same instant a crashing volley reverberated around the walls of the old tower.

Koyala was lying face down on the stone flag. Vincent crawled toward her and tried to pick her up to bring her to the window, but her weight was too much. All that he could do was to pull her off the stone.

The smoke lessened as willing hands below scattered the fire. Shod feet clicked on the brick of the ancient stair and strong hands, grimy but undeniably white, forced upward the stone. The first man to spring through the aperture was Peter Gross. He found Grace Coston, the American heiress, Koyala Bintang Burung, priestess of the Dyaks, and Vincent Brady, lying side by side. They were tenderly lifted down in the blessed sweet air below.

When Grace revived a few moments later she found Vincent leaning over her.

"Vincent!" she cried.

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"My love!" he exclaimed, folding her in his arms.

Peter Gross turned aside with a sigh. His promise had been redeemed. Also, a chapter in his life was over. He crossed to where Koyala lay. Captain Carver was roughly dressing her wound with such dressings as he had. Peter Gross slipped an arm under the unconscious girl's head to assist the captain. A moment later she opened her eyes. When she saw him a light of unearthly happiness glowed in them.

"I knew you would come, *mynheer*," she whispered weakly.

Captain Carver was uncovering her side where the Chinese guard's sword had bit through. Peter Gross gulped when he saw the wound and her garments saturated with blood.

Koyala gazed fascinatedly at the dripping garments they took from her. Suddenly her fingers reached weakly out for Peter Gross's hand and pressed it lightly.

"See, *mynheer*," she whispered faintly, "I am all white now. My mother's blood is bled from me!"

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE ARGUS PHEASANT'S FAREWELL

WHILE Peter Gross and Captain Carver were seeking to stanch the rapid flow of blood from the terrible wound in Koyala's side, Lieutenant Van Voort and his Javanese were scouring the jungle for the fleeing Malays and Chinese. Ignorant of the fact that Ah Sing had commanded the party in person, they did not press the search with as much ardor as they might have until a badly frightened datoo, on being questioned, admitted that the pirate chief himself had been their leader. Van Voort instantly put out his entire force to beat the jungle, but the delay had given the Chinaman sufficient time to escape. When it became apparent late in the day that the pirate leader had successfully eluded pursuit, Van Voort called his men together, and returned, much chagrined, to headquarters at Ah Sing's city.

In the mean time Koyala had been borne with all tenderness to the same place. Upon their arrival there, Captain Carver, who was a surgeon, made a more careful examination of her wound. His face was grave when he turned to Peter Gross, who was standing by, awaiting the verdict.

"The left lung is badly lacerated," he announced. "She has lost a great deal of blood. It will be a miracle if she lives. The only hope for her is to get somewhere at once where she can get the best medical attention and care."

"The nearest hospital is at Batavia," Peter Gross observed.

"Yes."

"You think she ought to go there?"

"If it could be arranged."

"Order a proa at once," the resident directed. "I am going to commandeer the Prins and take Koyala with me to Batavia. I shall leave you in charge. Please explain the situation to His Excellency. He will understand."

Carver nodded and withdrew, leaving the resident with the maid. All Koyala's nerve and tempestuous energy had vanished. She looked very frail indeed as she lay on the rude couch gasping painfully for breath. Each inhalation was like a knife-stab to Peter Gross. He felt that he was responsible for her condition. Had he not neglected her to enjoy Grace Coston's company, he told himself, Koyala would not have done as she did.

He remembered that Sachsen, Carver, and the governor-general had called her traitorous, and he had not come to her defense. Aye, he had almost been persuaded himself of her treachery. A poignant sense of shame filled his heart. Poor girl, how little any of them had understood her fond heart and passionate, rebellious soul! She had always given richly, both in loyalty and in service, and insult and distrust had been her reward. And now he, Peter Gross, who owed most to her, contributed this last sad chapter to the terrible tragedy of her life.

He buried his face in his hands and groaned.

The door opened softly and Captain Carver entered. "The proa is ready," he announced.

"Can she stand the journey?" Peter Gross asked anxiously.

"I hope so," Carver replied. "I cannot promise. But it is her only chance. We haven't the facilities here."

"I'm ready," Peter Gross declared.

Koyala was carried very gently to the rude wharf of bamboo and lowered into the proa. She knew nothing of the journey, for Captain Carver had administered an opiate. When she opened her eyes she was in the commander's room of the Prins Lodewyk, and Peter Gross was sitting beside her. As he noticed her eyes

glance bewilderedly around the room the resident smiled.

"You must not talk," he said. "We are taking you to a hospital at Batavia, where you shall receive the best of care."

"They are safe?" she whispered weakly.

He knew to whom she alluded. "I expect that they are probably back at Fort Wilhelmina by now," he replied. "They saw us off and begged me to express their gratitude to you. Miss Coston told me how you rescued her. She says she will always feel that she owes not only her life but something infinitely more precious to you. I think they will be very happy."

"It was all my fault," Koyala gasped wretchedly.

"You are a wonderfully brave and patient girl, and I was a fool!" Peter Gross contradicted. "They all admire and love you. But we must not talk any more. You must save your strength."

Koyala smiled pathetically.

"You are very good to me, Mynheer Gross," she said.

The Prins Lodewyk made a record run to Batavia. An ambulance met it at the wharf at Tanjong Priok. Koyala was removed to a hospital where the jungle-bred maid, whose only contact with civilization had been a boarding scholar's life at a mission school, enjoyed once more the luxury of clean linen and a soft bed.

Peter Gross visited her daily. In fact he spent hours at the hospital. The nurses came to watch for him in the morning after they had completed their customary ministrations to the patients. They wove strange romances about the tall, handsome young giant and the dusky maid of wondrous beauty whose eye followed his every motion so slavishly. But none of their tales approached in bizarreness the true story of these twain. Koyala's identity was kept a strict secret, and Peter Gross was careful to avoid giving any clue to his residence. It was commonly assumed that Koyala was a Hindu princess of rank, a raja's daughter, and Peter Gross a British-Indian official.

Koyala's convalescence was slow. Her terrible loss of blood sapped her vitality, and only her marvelous constitution enabled her to resist the fevers that began the third day after she was brought aboard the *Prins*. The attending physicians refused to hold out any hope for a long time, but finally their tone became more cheerful and eventually they pronounced her recovery certain.

When her convalescence advanced more rapidly, Peter Gross and Koyala had long talks. He found her hard to understand. Some days she was gay, with a hot tempestuous gayety that caused him to remonstrate with her and warn her against too great excitement in her present condition. At other times she was sad and depressed. She talked very little of Bulungan and Borneo. On the contrary, she pressed him for a daily account of his doings, whom he had met, what they had said, how he spent the hours he was away from her. Occasionally, too, she asked him for news of Grace Coston and Vincent Brady.

One day he entered her room with face aglow. "They are here," he announced—"Miss Coston and Mr. Brady. They wish to see you. They leave to-morrow for America."

Koyala seemed panic-stricken for a moment. Then she pulled herself together and requested that they be admitted.

Vincent entered impulsively, his boyish features aglow with gratitude. He clasped the limp hand Koyala gave him warmly and inquired solicitously whether she was regaining her strength. Koyala replied with subdued cordiality to his protestations of gratitude.

While the dialogue was going on, Grace remained in the background. Finally her eyes met Koyala's. The cheeks of both women flushed. Grace expressed herself reservedly. But the eyes of the two women exchanged more messages than their lips.

"Are you going back to America soon?" Koyala inquired at length.

"We leave to-morrow," Grace replied.



Koyala's glance stole toward Peter Gross. He was looking at Grace with a peculiar, wistful expression. She diverted the conversation to less personal channels.

When Vincent and his promised bride left she sank back on the pillows wearily.

"I am very tired to-day, Mynheer Gross," she said. "I wish I were back in Bulungan."

"We will both go there soon, I hope," he replied.

She glanced at him searchingly. "Are you not planning to go to America first?"

"I've rather given up that idea," he replied slowly. He looked up with a smile. "I couldn't very well do it under the conditions of the agreement we made that night at the fort, could I?" he asked.

Koyala did not reply. Her face was turned away from him and buried in the pillows. After a long silence she said:

"You may leave me now for a while, *mynheer*. I think I shall sleep."

When Peter Gross left the hospital he went to the governor-general's house. Van Schouten greeted him jovially.

"*Nu*, Mynheer Gross," he exclaimed, "how do you find the fleshpots of Egypt? *Ver dikke*, if we permit you to idle much longer here in Batavia you will acquire a paunch like some of the generals the colonial office sends us to chase rebellious tribesmen."

"I shall be happy to return to my duties as soon as the Juffrouw Koyala recovers, Your Excellency," Peter Gross replied gravely.

"I know that, *mynheer*, I know that," the governor replied warmly. "I wish I had more residents with the appetite for work that you have. But I am detaining you. Sachsen, I think, wishes to speak with you."

Peter Gross went in search of his old friend and foster-father. He found Sachsen perched before a huge tome containing accounts of the importation and exportation of goods from Lombock. Sachsen peered over his spectacles as the resident entered and thrust the

book back when he recognized his visitor. His wrinkled face expanded into a cordial smile of welcome.

"*Vrind Pieter!*" he exclaimed. "I was just thinking of you, my son."

"They all seem to be thinking of me," Peter Gross replied cheerfully. "The governor was just asking me when I would be ready to go back to Bulungan."

"Will you go soon, *Vrind Pieter?*" Sachsen inquired mildly.

"As soon as Koyala recovers."

"You do not intend to go to America, then?"

"I don't think I should," Peter Gross replied candidly. "My first duty is to Bulungan—and to Koyala. She has suffered much on account of me. It is only fair that I should do what I could to make her a bit happier."

Sachsen toyed with his spectacle case.

"Happier in what way, *mynheer?*" he inquired.

"Go with her to Bulungan. Work with her to regenerate the residency."

"You do not mean anything else?"

Their eyes met. Peter Gross guessed Sachsen's meaning. The color mounted to his face and he gazed pensively at the floor.

"I don't know," he said. "I've sometimes thought of it. Perhaps I should marry her. I surely owe it to her."

"You do not love her, then?" Sachsen asked in a voice of marked relief.

Peter Gross shook his head. "Sachsen," he said sadly, "I don't believe it lies in me to love any woman. There was a time when I thought something like that was coming over me, but that's all over." He lifted his head with a weary sigh.

"You must not wed Koyala," Sachsen said.

"Why?"

The old man looked at the younger man fixedly.

"Because you do not love her."

Peter Gross's eyes fell.

"I could give her protection," he argued weakly.

"That is the essential thing a woman needs, particularly a woman such as she."

"A woman requires more than protection to give her happiness. She needs love. But there is a second and greater reason why you cannot wed her," Sachsen declared calmly.

"What is that?"

"Because of those who come after you."

Peter Gross did not reply. He gazed sternly at the floor. His mind filled with silent thoughts.

"Marriage," Sachsen continued softly, "means offspring. It is a law of the human race that those of different pigments should not mate. Only sadness and sorrow can come from such a mating. The burden of the grief falls on the next generation. Koyala herself is sufficient exemplification of this law. With all her wondrous beauty it is best that the house of Chawangi die with her."

He paused. In the stillness they could hear a song-bird singing its full heart out to its mate.

"The lion mates with the lioness, the ram with the ewe, each living creature kind to kind," Sachsen pointed out. "The same principle applies to man. You must forget this thought, *Vrind Pieter*."

"And be a damned ingrate!" Peter Gross replied savagely, bursting through the door without so much as a word of farewell.

Three days later a hurried summons called Peter Gross to the hospital. A badly worried superintendent met him.

"Our patient is gone," he announced. "We've searched high and low and cannot find the slightest trace of her. She was in the garden with the other convalescents this morning, and that is the last that has been seen of her. Under her pillow we found this note addressed to you."

Peter Gross tore open the envelope with trembling hand. This was the message he read:

"Good-by, Myheer Gross. I am returning to my people. It is best that we do not see each other again.

You are absolved from your promise to me. I wish you every happiness in your return to your own land. I will never forget what I owe to you."

There was no signature. But pinned to the bottom of the sheet was a tiny feather, an Argus pheasant feather.

Peter Gross's eyes dimmed. Meeting the superintendent's glance he asked gravely:

"The packet left at noon for Bandjer, did it not?"

"Yes, *mynheer*."

"Then there is no further need of looking for her," he announced. With this cryptic statement he hastened to the governor-general's quarters. Sachsen met him as he entered the building. Eyes blinded with tears, Peter Gross showed him the note.

"It is sad, but for the best, *Vrind Pieter*," the old man declared sympathetically. "She is wise beyond her years—wiser than thou art, my son. Go to America as she says. I will explain to His Excellency."

Peter Gross gazed at the distant stretches of ocean, visible through a lofty arched window. The sea rolled invitingly northward.

"I have wasted days long enough, *Vrind Sachsen*," he replied softly. "Ah Sing is still at large, there is work for me to do in Bulungan. To-morrow I go home."

THE END

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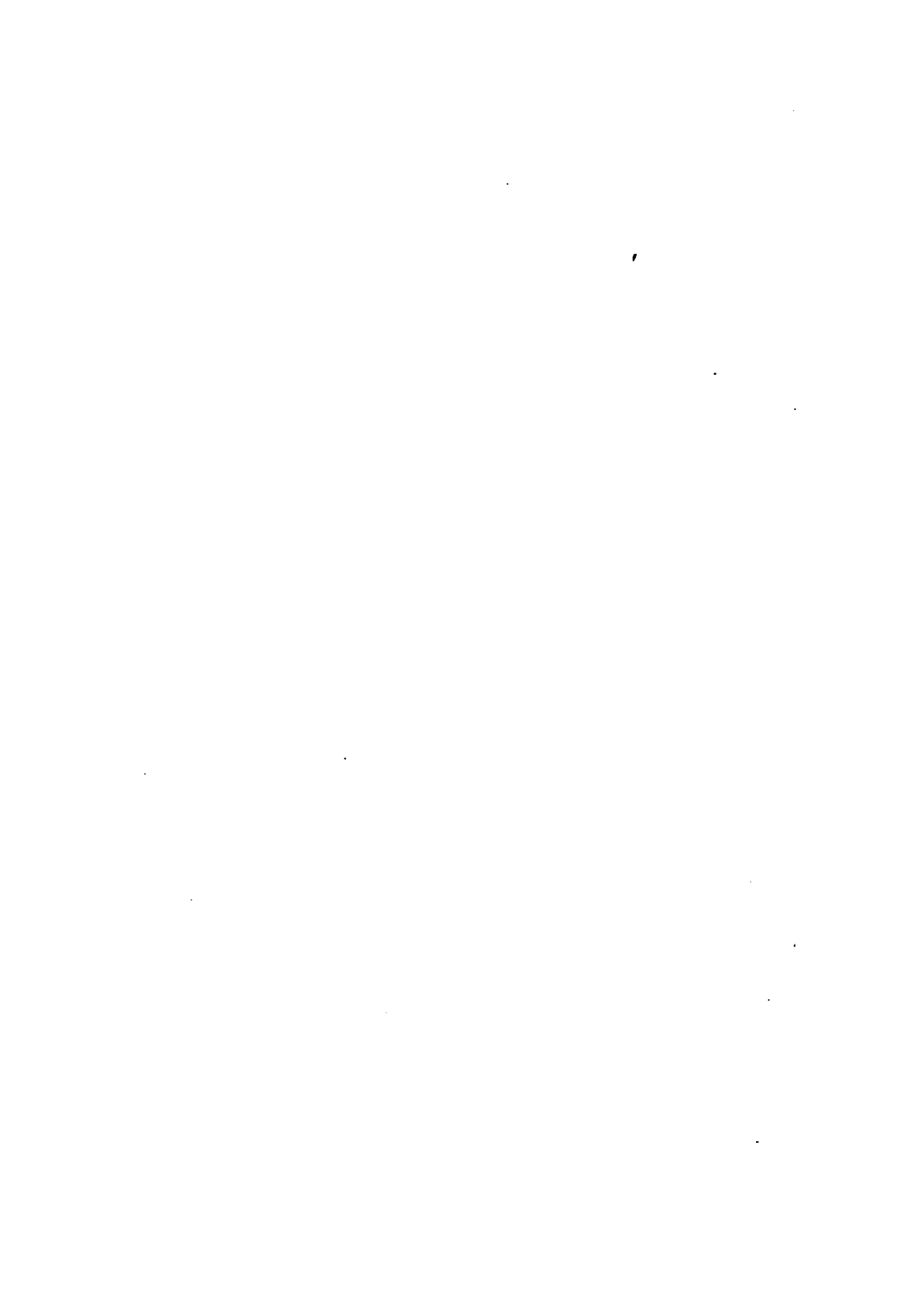






















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