

Chapter 7 - THE BULL WHIP

As von Horn and Virginia Maxon walked slowly beneath the dense shadows of the jungle he again renewed his suit. It would please him more to have the girl accompany him voluntarily than to be compelled to take her by force, but take her he would one way or another, and that, this very night, for all the plans were made and already under way.

"I cannot do it, Doctor von Horn," she had said. "No matter how much danger I may be in here I cannot desert my father on this lonely isle with only savage lascars and the terrible monsters of his own creation surrounding him. Why, it would be little short of murder for us to do such a thing. I cannot see how you, his most trusted lieutenant, can even give an instant's consideration to the idea.

"And now that you insist that his mind is sorely affected, it is only an added reason why I must remain with him to protect him so far as I am able, from himself and his enemies."

Von Horn did not relish the insinuation in the accent which the girl put upon the last word.

"It is because I love you so, Virginia," he hastened to urge in extenuation of his suggested disloyalty. "I cannot see you sacrificed to his horrible mania. You do not realize the imminence of your peril. Tomorrow Number Thirteen was to have come to live beneath the same roof with you. You recall Number One whom the stranger killed as the thing was bearing you away through the jungle? Can you imagine sleeping in the same house with such a soulless thing? Eating your three meals a day at the same table with it? And knowing all the time that in a few short weeks at the most you were destined to be given to the thing as its mate? Virginia, you must be mad to consider for a moment remaining within reach of such a terrible peril.

"Come to Singapore with me--it will take but a few days--and then we can return with some good medical man and a couple of Europeans, and take your father away from the terrible creatures he has created. You will be mine then and safe from the awful fate that now lies back there in the camp awaiting you. We can take your father upon a long trip where rest and quiet can have an opportunity to restore his enfeebled mentality. Come, Virginia! Come with me now. We can go directly to the Ithaca and safety. Say that you will come."

The girl shook her head.

"I do not love you, I am afraid, Doctor von Horn, or I should certainly be moved by your appeal. If you wish to bring help for my father I shall never cease to thank you if you will go to Singapore and fetch it, but it is not necessary that I go. My place is here, near him."

In the darkness the girl did not see the change that came over the man's face, but his next words revealed his altered attitude with sufficient exactitude to thoroughly arouse her fears.

"Virginia," he said, "I love you, and I intend to have you. Nothing on earth can prevent me. When you know me better you will return my love, but now I must risk offending you that I may save you for myself from the monstrous connection which your father contemplates for you. If you will not come away from the island with me voluntarily I consider it my duty to take you away by force."

"You would never do that, Doctor von Horn!" she exclaimed.

Von Horn had gone too far. He cursed himself inwardly for a fool. Why the devil didn't that villain, Bududreen, come! He should have been along to act his part half an hour before.

"No, Virginia," said the man, softly, after a moment's silence, "I could not do that; though my judgment tells me that I should do it. You shall remain here if you insist and I will be with you to serve and protect both you and your father."

The words were fair, but the girl could not forget the ugly tone that had tinged his preceding statement. She felt that she would be glad when she found herself safely within the bungalow once more.

"Come," she said, "it is late. Let us return to camp."

Von Horn was about to reply when the war cries of Muda Saffir's Dyaks as they rushed out upon Bududreen and his companions came to them distinctly through the tropic night.

"What was that?" cried the girl in an alarmed tone.

"God knows," replied von Horn. "Can it be that our men have mutinied?"

He thought the six with Bududreen were carrying out their part in a most realistic manner, and a grim smile tinged his hard face.

Virginia Maxon turned resolutely toward the camp.

"I must go back there to my father," she said, "and so must you. Our place is there--God give that we be not too late," and before von Horn could stop her she turned and ran through the darkness of the jungle in the direction of the camp.

Von Horn dashed after her, but so black was the night beneath the overhanging trees, festooned with their dark myriad creepers, that the girl was out of sight in an instant, and upon the soft carpet of the rotting vegetation her light footfalls gave no sound.

The doctor made straight for the camp, but Virginia, unused to jungle trailing even by day, veered sharply to the left. The sounds which had guided her at first soon died out, the brush became thicker, and presently she realized that she had no conception of the direction of the camp. Coming to a spot where the trees were less dense, and a little moonlight filtered to the ground, she paused to rest and attempt to regain her bearings.

As she stood listening for some sound which might indicate the whereabouts of the camp, she detected the noise of a body approaching through the underbrush. Whether man or beast she could but conjecture and so she stood with every nerve taut waiting the thing that floundered heavily toward her. She hoped it might be von Horn, but the hideous war cries which had apprised her of enemies at the encampment made her fear that fate might be directing the footsteps of one of these upon her.

Nearer and nearer came the sound, and the girl stood poised ready to fly when the dark face of Bududreen suddenly emerged into the moonlight beside her. With an hysterical cry of relief the girl greeted him.

"Oh, Bududreen," she exclaimed, "what has happened at camp? Where is my father? Is he safe? Tell me."

The Malay could scarce believe the good fortune which had befallen him so quickly following the sore affliction of losing the treasure. His evil mind worked quickly, so that he grasped the full possibilities that were his before the girl had finished her questioning.

"The camp was attacked by Dyaks, Miss Maxon," he replied. "Many of our men were killed, but your father escaped and has gone to the ship. I have been searching for you and Doctor von Horn. Where is he?"

"He was with me but a moment ago. When we heard the cries at camp I hastened on to discover what calamity had befallen us--we became separated."

"He will be safe," said Bududreen, "for two of my men are waiting to guide you and the doctor to the ship in case you returned to camp before I found you. Come, we will hasten on to the harbor. Your father will be worried if we are long delayed, and he is anxious to make sail and escape before the Dyaks discover the location of the Ithaca."

The man's story seemed plausible enough to Virginia, although she could not repress a little pang of regret that her father had been willing to go on to the harbor before he knew her fate. However, she explained that by her belief that his mind was unbalanced through constant application to his weird obsession.

Without demur, then, she turned and accompanied the rascally Malay toward the harbor. At the bank of the little stream which led down to the Ithaca's berth the man lifted her to his shoulder and thus bore her the balance of the way to the beach. Here two of his men were awaiting him in one of the ship's boats, and without words they embarked and pulled for the vessel.

Once on board Virginia started immediately for her father's cabin. As she crossed the deck she noticed that the ship was ready to sail, and even as she descended the companionway she heard the rattle of the anchor chain about the capstan. She wondered if von Horn could be on board too. It seemed remarkable that all should have reached the Ithaca so quickly, and equally strange that none of her own people were on deck to welcome her, or to command the vessel.

To her chagrin she found her father's cabin empty, and a moment's hurried investigation disclosed the fact that von Horn's was unoccupied as well. Now her doubts turned quickly to fears, and with a little gasp of dismay at the grim possibilities which surged through her imagination she ran quickly to the companionway, but above her she saw that the hatch was down, and when she reached the top that it was fastened. Futilely she beat upon the heavy planks with her delicate hands, calling aloud to Bududreen to release her, but there was no reply, and with the realization of the hopelessness of her position she dropped back to the deck, and returned to her stateroom. Here she locked and barricaded the door as best she could, and throwing herself upon the berth awaited in dry-eyed terror the next blow that fate held in store for her.

Shortly after von Horn became separated from Virginia he collided with the fleeing lascar who had escaped the parangs of Muda Saffir's head hunters at the same time as had Bududreen. So terror stricken was the fellow that he had thrown away his weapons in the panic of flight, which was all that saved von Horn from death at the hands of the fear crazed man. To him, in the extremity of his fright, every man was an enemy, and the doctor had a tough scuffle with him before he could impress upon the fellow that he was a friend.

From him von Horn obtained an incoherent account of the attack, together with the statement that he was the only person in camp that escaped, all the others having been cut down by the savage horde that overwhelmed them. It was with difficulty that von Horn persuaded the man to return with him to the campong, but finally, he consented to do so when the doctor with drawn revolver, presented death as the only alternative.

Together they cautiously crept back toward the palisade, not knowing at what moment they might come upon the savage enemy that had wrought such havoc among their forces, for von Horn believed the lascar's story that all had perished. His only motive for returning lay in his desire to prevent Virginia Maxon falling into the hands of the Dyaks, or, failing that, rescuing her from their clutches.

Whatever faults and vices were Carl von Horn's cowardice was not one of them, and it was without an instant's hesitation that he had elected to return to succor the girl he believed to have returned to camp, although he entertained no scruples regarding the further pursuit of his dishonorable intentions toward her, should he succeed in saving her from her other enemies.

As the two approached the campong quiet seemed to have again fallen about the scene of the recent alarm. Muda Saffir had passed on toward the cove with the heavy chest, and the scrimmage in the bungalow was over. But von Horn did not abate his watchfulness as he stole silently within the precincts of the north campong, and, hugging the denser shadows of the palisade, crept toward the house.

The dim light in the living room drew him to one of the windows which overlooked the verandah. A glance within showed him Sing and Number Thirteen bending over the body of Professor Maxon. He noted the handsome face and perfect figure of the young giant. He saw the bodies of the dead lascars and Dyaks. Then he saw Sing and the young man lift Professor Maxon tenderly in their arms and bear him to his own room.

A sudden wave of jealous rage swept through the man's vicious brain. He saw that the soulless thing within was endowed with a kindlier and more noble nature than he himself possessed. He had planted the seed of hatred and revenge within his untutored heart without avail, for he read in the dead bodies of Bududreen's men and the two Dyaks the story of Number Thirteen's defense of the man von Horn had hoped he would kill.

Von Horn was quite sure now that Virginia Maxon was not within the campong. Either she had become confused and lost in the jungle after she left him, or had fallen into the hands of the wild horde that had attacked the camp. Convinced of

this, there was no obstacle to thwart the sudden plan which entered his malign brain. With a single act he could rid himself of the man whom he had come to look upon as a rival, whose physical beauty aroused his envy and jealousy; he could remove, in the person of Professor Maxon, the parental obstacle which might either prevent his obtaining the girl, or make serious trouble for him in case he took her by force, and at the same time he could transfer to the girl's possession the fortune which was now her father's--and he could accomplish it all without tainting his own hands with the blood of his victims.

As the full possibilities of his devilish scheme unfolded before his mind's eye a grim smile curled his straight, thin lips at the thought of the fate which it entailed for the creator of the hideous monsters of the court of mystery.

As he turned away from the bungalow his eye fell upon the trembling lascar who had accompanied him to the edge of the verandah. He must be rid of the fellow in some way--no eye must see him perpetrate the deed he had in mind. A solution quickly occurred to him.

"Hasten to the harbor," he said to the man in a low voice, "and tell those on board the ship that I shall join them presently. Have all in readiness to sail. I wish to fetch some of my belongings--all within the bungalow are dead."

No command could have better suited the sailor. Without a word he turned and fled toward the jungle. Von Horn walked quickly to the workshop. The door hung open. Through the dark interior he strode straight to the opposite door which let upon the court of mystery. On a nail driven into the door frame hung a heavy bull whip. The doctor took it down as he raised the strong bar which held the door. Then he stepped through into the moonlit inner campong--the bull whip in his right hand, a revolver in his left.

A half dozen misshapen monsters roved restlessly about the hard packed earth of the pen. The noise of the battle in the adjoining enclosure had aroused them from slumber and awakened in their half formed brains vague questionings and fears. At sight of von Horn several of them rushed for him with menacing growls, but a swift crack of the bull whip brought them to a sudden realization of the identity of the intruder, so that they slunk away, muttering and whining in rage.

Von Horn passed quickly to the low shed in which the remainder of the eleven were sleeping. With vicious cuts from the stinging lash he lay about him upon the sleeping things. Roaring and shrieking in pain and anger the creatures stumbled to their feet and lumbered awkwardly into the open. Two of them turned upon their tormentor, but the burning weapon on their ill protected flesh

sent them staggering back out of reach, and in another moment all were huddled in the center of the campong.

As cattle are driven, von Horn drove the miserable creatures toward the door of the workshop. At the threshold of the dark interior the frightened things halted fearfully, and then as von Horn urged them on from behind with his cruel whip they milled as cattle at the entrance to a strange corral.

Again and again he urged them for the door, but each time they turned away, and to escape the whip beat and tore at the wall of the palisade in a vain effort to batter it from their pathway. Their roars and shrieks were almost deafening as von Horn, losing what little remained of his scant self-control, dashed among them laying to right and left with the stern whip and the butt of his heavy revolver.

Most of the monsters scattered and turned back into the center of the enclosure, but three of them were forced through the doorway into the workshop, from the darkness of which they saw the patch of moonlight through the open door upon the opposite side. Toward this they scurried as von Horn turned back into the court of mystery for the others.

Three more herculean efforts he made before he beat the last of the creatures through the outer doorway of the workshop into the north campong.

Among the age old arts of the celestials none is more strangely inspiring than that of medicine. Odd herbs and unspeakable things when properly compounded under a favorable aspect of the heavenly bodies are potent to achieve miraculous cures, and few are the Chinamen who do not brew some special concoction of their own devising for the lesser ills which beset mankind.

Sing was no exception in this respect. In various queerly shaped, bamboo covered jars he maintained a supply of tonics, balms and lotions. His first thought when he had made Professor Maxon comfortable upon the couch was to fetch his pet nostrum, for there burned strong within his yellow breast the same powerful yearning to experiment that marks the greatest of the profession to whose mysteries he aspired.

Though the hideous noises from the inner campong rose threateningly, the imperturbable Sing left the bungalow and passed across the north campong to the little lean-to that he had built for himself against the palisade that separated the north enclosure from the court of mystery.

Here he rummaged about in the dark until he had found the two phials he sought. The noise of the monsters upon the opposite side of the palisade had

now assumed the dimensions of pandemonium, and through it all the Chinaman heard the constant crack that was the sharp voice of the bull whip.

He had completed his search and was about to return to the bungalow when the first of the monsters emerged into the north campong from the workshop. At the door of his shack Sing Lee drew back to watch, for he knew that behind them some one was driving these horribly grotesque creatures from their prison.

One by one they came lumbering into the moonlight until Sing had counted eleven, and then, after them, came a white man, bull whip and revolver in hand. It was von Horn. The equatorial moon shone full upon him--there could be no mistake. The Chinaman saw him turn and lock the workshop door; saw him cross the campong to the outer gate; saw him pass through toward the jungle, closing the gate.

Of a sudden there was a sad, low moaning through the surrounding trees; dense, black clouds obscured the radiant moon; and then with hideous thunder and vivid flashes of lightning the tempest broke in all its fury of lashing wind and hurtling deluge. It was the first great storm of the breaking up of the monsoon, and under the cover of its darkness Sing Lee scurried through the monster filled campong to the bungalow. Within he found the young man bathing Professor Maxon's head as he had directed him to do.

"All gettee out," he said, jerking his thumb in the direction of the court of mystery. "Eleven devils. Plenty soon come bung'low. What do?"

Number Thirteen had seen von Horn's extra bull whip hanging upon a peg in the living room. For answer he stepped into that room and took the weapon down. Then he returned to the professor's side.

Outside the frightened monsters groped through the blinding rain and darkness in search of shelter. Each vivid lightning flash, and bellowing of booming thunder brought responsive cries of rage and terror from their hideous lips. It was Number Twelve who first spied the dim light showing through the bungalow's living room window. With a low guttural to his companions he started toward the building. Up the low steps to the verandah they crept. Number Twelve peered through the window. He saw no one within, but there was warmth and dryness.

His little knowledge and lesser reasoning faculties suggested no thought of a doorway. With a blow he shattered the glass of the window. Then he forced his body through the narrow aperture. At the same moment a gust of wind sucking through the broken panes drew open the door, and as Number Thirteen, warned by the sound of breaking glass, sprang into the living room he was confronted by the entire horde of misshapen beings.

His heart went out in pity toward the miserable crew, but he knew that his life as well as those of the two men in the adjoining room depended upon the force and skill with which he might handle the grave crisis which confronted them. He had seen and talked with most of the creatures when from time to time they had been brought singly into the workshop that their creator might mitigate the wrong he had done by training the poor minds with which he had endowed them to reason intelligently.

A few were hopeless imbeciles, unable to comprehend more than the rudimentary requirements of filling their bellies when food was placed before them; yet even these were endowed with superhuman strength; and when aroused battled the more fiercely for the very reason of their brainlessness. Others, like Number Twelve, were of a higher order of intelligence. They spoke English, and, after a fashion, reasoned in a crude sort of way. These were by far the most dangerous, for as the power of comparison is the fundamental principle of reasoning, so they were able to compare their lot with that of the few other men they had seen, and with the help of von Horn to partially appreciate the horrible wrong that had been done them.

Von Horn, too, had let them know the identity of their creator, and thus implanted in their malformed brains the insidious poison of revenge. Envy and jealousy were there as well, and hatred of all beings other than themselves. They envied the ease and comparative beauty of the old professor and his assistant, and hated the latter for the cruelty of the bull whip and the constant menace of the ever ready revolver; and so as they were to them the representatives of the great human world of which they could never be a part, their envy and jealousy and hatred of these men embraced the entire race which they represented.

It was such that Number Thirteen faced as he emerged from the professor's apartment.

"What do you want here?" he said, addressing Number Twelve, who stood a little in advance of the others.

"We have come for Maxon," growled the creature. "We have been penned up long enough. We want to be out here. We have come to kill Maxon and you and all who have made us what we are."

"Why do you wish to kill me?" asked the young man. "I am one of you. I was made in the same way that you were made."

Number Twelve opened his mismated eyes in astonishment.

"Then you have already killed Maxon?" he asked.

"No. He was wounded by a savage enemy. I have been helping to make him well again. He has wronged me as much as he has you. If I do not wish to kill him, why should you? He did not mean to wrong us. He thought that he was doing right. He is in trouble now and we should stay and protect him."

"He lies," suddenly shouted another of the horde. "He is not one of us. Kill him! Kill him! Kill Maxon, too, and then we shall be as other men, for it is these men who keep us as we are."

The fellow started forward toward Number Thirteen as he spoke, and moved by the impulse of imitation the others came on with him.

"I have spoken fairly to you," said Number Thirteen in a low voice. "If you cannot understand fairness here is something you can understand."

Raising the bull whip above his head the young giant leaped among the advancing brutes and lay about him with mighty strokes that put to shame the comparatively feeble blows with which von Horn had been wont to deal out punishment to the poor, damned creatures of the court of mystery.

For a moment they stood valiantly before his attack, but after two had grappled with him and been hurled headlong to the floor they gave up and rushed incontinently out into the maelstrom of the screaming tempest.

In the doorway behind him Sing Lee had been standing waiting the outcome of the encounter and ready to lend a hand were it required. As the two men turned back into the professor's room they saw that the wounded man's eyes were open and upon them. At sight of Number Thirteen a questioning look came into his eyes.

"What has happened?" he asked feebly of Sing. "Where is my daughter? Where is Dr. von Horn? What is this creature doing out of his pen?"

The blow of the parang upon the professor's skull had shocked his overwrought mind back into the path of sanity. It had left him with a clear remembrance of the past, other than the recent fight in the living room--that was a blank--and it had given him a clearer perspective of the plans he had been entertaining for so long relative to this soulless creature.

The first thought that sprang to his mind as he saw Number Thirteen before him was of his mad intention to give his daughter to such a monstrous thing. With the recollection came a sudden loathing and hatred of this and the other creatures of his unholy experimentations.

Presently he realized that his questions had not been answered.

"Sing!" he shouted. "Answer me. Where are Virginia and Dr. von Horn?"

"All gonee. Me no know. All gonee. Maybeso allee dead."

"My God!" groaned the stricken man; and then his eyes again falling upon the silent giant in the doorway, "Out of my sight," he shrieked. "Out of my sight! Never let me see you again--and to think that I would have given my only daughter to a soulless thing like you. Away! Before I go mad and slay you."

Slowly the color mounted to the neck and face of the giant--then suddenly it receded, leaving him as ashen as death. His great hand gripped the stock of the bull whip. A single blow was all that would have been needed to silence Professor Maxon forever. There was murder in the wounded heart. The man took a step forward into the room, and then something drew his eyes to a spot upon the wall just above Professor Maxon's shoulder--it was a photograph of Virginia Maxon.

Without a word Number Thirteen turned upon his heel and passed out into the storm.