

## **Chapter 11 - "I AM COMING!"**

The morning following the capture of Virginia Maxon by Muda Saffir, Professor Maxon, von Horn, Sing Lee and the sole surviving lascar from the crew of the Ithaca set out across the strait toward the mainland of Borneo in the small boat which the doctor had secreted in the jungle near the harbor. The party was well equipped with firearms and ammunition, and the bottom of the boat was packed full with provisions and cooking utensils. Von Horn had been careful to see that the boat was furnished with a mast and sail, and now, under a good breeze the party was making excellent time toward the mysterious land of their destination.

They had scarcely cleared the harbor when they sighted a ship far out across the strait. Its erratic movements riveted their attention upon it, and later, as they drew nearer, they perceived that the strange craft was a good sized schooner with but a single short mast and tiny sail. For a minute or two her sail would belly with the wind and the vessel make headway, then she would come suddenly about, only to repeat the same tactics a moment later. She sailed first this way and then that, losing one minute what she had gained the minute before.

Von Horn was the first to recognize her.

"It is the Ithaca," he said, "and her Dyak crew are having a devil of a time managing her--she acts as though she were rudderless."

Von Horn ran the small boat within hailing distance of the dismasted hulk whose side was now lined with waving, gesticulating natives. They were peaceful fishermen, they explained, whose prahus had been wrecked in the recent typhoon. They had barely escaped with their lives by clambering aboard this wreck which Allah had been so merciful as to place directly in their road. Would the Tuan Besar be so good as to tell them how to make the big prahu steer?

Von Horn promised to help them on condition that they would guide him and his party to the stronghold of Rajah Muda Saffir in the heart of Borneo. The Dyaks willingly agreed, and von Horn worked his small boat in close under the Ithaca's stern. Here he found that the rudder had been all but unshipped, probably as the vessel was lifted over the reef during the storm, but a single pintle remaining in its gudgeon. A half hour's work was sufficient to repair the damage, and then the two boats continued their journey toward the mouth of the river up which those they sought had passed the night before.

Inside the river's mouth an anchorage was found for the Ithaca near the very island upon which the fierce battle between Number Thirteen and Muda Saffir's

forces had occurred. From the deck of the larger vessel the deserted prahu which had borne Bulan across the strait was visible, as were the bodies of the slain Dyaks and the misshapen creatures of the white giant's forces.

In excited tones the head hunters called von Horn's attention to these evidences of conflict, and the doctor drew his boat up to the island and leaped ashore, followed by Professor Maxon and Sing. Here they found the dead bodies of the four monsters who had fallen in an attempt to rescue their creator's daughter, though little did any there imagine the real truth.

About the corpses of the four were the bodies of a dozen Dyak warriors attesting to the ferocity of the encounter and the savage prowess of the unarmed creatures who had sold their poor lives so dearly.

"Evidently they fell out about the possession of the captive," suggested von Horn. "Let us hope that she did not fall into the clutches of Number Thirteen--any fate would be better than that."

"God give that that has not befallen her," moaned Professor Maxon. "The pirates might but hold her for ransom, but should that soulless fiend possess her my prayer is that she found the strength and the means to take her own life before he had an opportunity to have his way with her."

"Amen," agreed von Horn.

Sing Lee said nothing, but in his heart he hoped that Virginia Maxon was not in the power of Rajah Muda Saffir. The brief experience he had had with Number Thirteen during the fight in the bungalow had rather warmed his wrinkled old heart toward the friendless young giant, and he was a sufficiently good judge of human nature to be confident that the girl would be comparatively safe in his keeping.

It was quickly decided to abandon the small boat and embark the entire party in the deserted war prahu. A half hour later saw the strangely mixed expedition forging up the river, but not until von Horn had boarded the Ithaca and discovered to his dismay that the chest was not on board her.

Far above them on the right bank Muda Saffir still squatted in his hiding place, for no friendly prahu or sampan had passed his way since dawn. His keen eyes roving constantly up and down the long stretch of river that was visible from his position finally sighted a war prahu coming toward him from down stream. As it drew closer he recognized it as one which had belonged to his own fleet before his unhappy encounter with the wild white man and his abhorrent pack, and a moment later his heart leaped as he saw the familiar faces of several of his men;

but who were the strangers in the stern, and what was a Chinaman doing perched there upon the bow?

The prahu was nearly opposite him before he recognized Professor Maxon and von Horn as the white men of the little island. He wondered how much they knew of his part in the raid upon their encampment. Bududreen had told him much concerning the doctor, and as Muda Saffir recalled the fact that von Horn was anxious to possess himself of both the treasure and the girl he guessed that he would be safe in the man's hands so long as he could hold out promises of turning one or the other over to him; and so, as he was tired of squatting upon the uncomfortable bank and was very hungry, he arose and hailed the passing prahu.

His men recognized his voice immediately and as they knew nothing of the defection of any of their fellows, turned the boat's prow toward shore without waiting for the command from von Horn. The latter, fearing treachery, sprang to his feet with raised rifle, but when one of the paddlers explained that it was the Rajah Muda Saffir who hailed them and that he was alone von Horn permitted them to draw nearer the shore, though he continued to stand ready to thwart any attempted treachery and warned both the professor and Sing to be on guard.

As the prahu's nose touched the bank Muda Saffir stepped aboard and with many protestations of gratitude explained that he had fallen overboard from his own prahu the night before and that evidently his followers thought him drowned, since none of his boats had returned to search for him. Scarcely had the Malay seated himself before von Horn began questioning him in the rajah's native tongue, not a word of which was intelligible to Professor Maxon. Sing, however, was as familiar with it as was von Horn.

"Where are the girl and the treasure?" he asked.

"What girl, Tuan Besar?" inquired the wily Malay innocently. "And what treasure? The white man speaks in riddles."

"Come, come," cried von Horn impatiently. "Let us have no foolishness. You know perfectly well what I mean--it will go far better with you if we work together as friends. I want the girl--if she is unharmed--and I will divide the treasure with you if you will help me to obtain them; otherwise you shall have no part of either. What do you say? Shall we be friends or enemies?"

"The girl and the treasure were both stolen from me by a rascally panglima, Ninaka," said Muda Saffir, seeing that it would be as well to simulate friendship for the white man for the time being at least--there would always be an

opportunity to use a kris upon him in the remote fastness of the interior to which Muda Saffir would lead them.

"What became of the white man who led the strange monsters?" asked von Horn.

"He killed many of my men, and the last I saw of him he was pushing up the river after the girl and the treasure," replied the Malay.

"If another should ask you," continued von Horn with a meaningful glance toward Professor Maxon, "it will be well to say that the girl was stolen by this white giant and that you suffered defeat in an attempt to rescue her because of your friendship for us. Do you understand?"

Muda Saffir nodded. Here was a man after his own heart, which loved intrigue and duplicity. Evidently he would be a good ally in wreaking vengeance upon the white giant who had caused all his discomfiture--afterward there was always the kris if the other should become inconvenient.

At the long-house at which Barunda and Ninaka had halted, Muda Saffir learned all that had transpired, his informants being the two Dyaks who had led Bulan and his pack into the jungle. He imparted the information to von Horn and both men were delighted that thus their most formidable enemy had been disposed of. It would be but a question of time before the inexperienced creatures perished in the dense forest--that they ever could retrace their steps to the river was most unlikely, and the chances were that one by one they would be dispatched by head hunters while they slept.

Again the party embarked, reinforced by the two Dyaks who were only too glad to renew their allegiance to Muda Saffir while he was backed by the guns of the white men. On and on they paddled up the river, gleaning from the dwellers in the various long-houses information of the passing of the two prahu with Barunda, Ninaka, and the white girl.

Professor Maxon was impatient to hear every detail that von Horn obtained from Muda Saffir and the various Dyaks that were interviewed at the first long-house and along the stretch of river they covered. The doctor told him that Number Thirteen still had Virginia and was fleeing up the river in a swift prahu. He enlarged upon the valor shown by Muda Saffir and his men in their noble attempt to rescue his daughter, and through it all Sing Lee sat with half closed eyes, apparently oblivious to all that passed before him. What were the workings of that intricate celestial brain none can say.

Far in the interior of the jungle Bulan and his five monsters stumbled on in an effort to find the river. Had they known it they were moving parallel with the

stream, but a few miles from it. At times it wound in wide detours close to the path of the lost creatures, and again it circled far away from them.

As they travelled they subsisted upon the fruits with which they had become familiar upon the island of their creation. They suffered greatly for lack of water, but finally stumbled upon a small stream at which they filled their parched stomachs. Here it occurred to Bulan that it would be wise to follow the little river, since they could be no more completely lost than they now were no matter where it should lead them, and it would at least insure them plenty of fresh water.

As they proceeded down the bank of the stream it grew in size until presently it became a fair sized river, and Bulan had hopes that it might indeed prove the stream that they had ascended from the ocean and that soon he would meet with the prahus and possibly find Virginia Maxon herself. The strenuous march of the six through the jungle had torn their light cotton garments into shreds so that they were all practically naked, while their bodies were scratched and bleeding from countless wounds inflicted by sharp thorns and tangled brambles through which they had forced their way.

Bulan still carried his heavy bull whip while his five companions were armed with the parangs they had taken from the Dyaks they had overpowered upon the island at the mouth of the river. It was upon this strange and remarkable company that the sharp eyes of a score of river Dyaks peered through the foliage. The head hunters had been engaged in collecting camphor crystals when their quick ears caught the noisy passage of the six while yet at a considerable distance, and with ready parangs the savages crept stealthily toward the sound of the advancing party.

At first they were terror stricken at the hideous visages of five of the creatures they beheld, but when they saw how few their numbers, and how poorly armed they were, as well as the awkwardness with which they carried their parangs, denoting their unfamiliarity with the weapons, they took heart and prepared to ambush them.

What prizes those terrible heads would be when properly dried and decorated! The savages fairly trembled in anticipation of the commotion they would cause in the precincts of their long-house when they returned with six such magnificent trophies.

Their victims came blundering on through the dense jungle to where the twenty sleek brown warriors lay in wait for them. Bulan was in the lead, and close behind him in single file lumbered his awkward crew. Suddenly there was a

chorus of savage cries close beside him and simultaneously he found himself in the midst of twenty cutting, slashing parangs.

Like lightning his bull whip flew into action, and to the astonished warriors it was as though a score of men were upon them in the person of this mighty white giant. Following the example of their leader the five creatures at his back leaped upon the nearest warriors, and though they wielded their parangs awkwardly the superhuman strength back of their cuts and thrusts sent the already blood stained blades through many a brown body.

The Dyaks would gladly have retreated after the first surprise of their initial attack, but Bulan urged his men on after them, and so they were forced to fight to preserve their lives at all. At last five of them managed to escape into the jungle, but fifteen remained quietly upon the earth where they had fallen--the victims of their own over confidence. Beside them lay two of Bulan's five, so that now the little party was reduced to four--and the problem that had faced Professor Maxon was so much closer to its own solution.

From the bodies of the dead Dyaks Bulan and his three companions, Number Three, Number Ten, and Number Twelve, took enough loin cloths, caps, war-coats, shields and weapons to fit them out completely, after discarding the ragged remnants of their cotton pajamas, and now, even more terrible in appearance than before, the rapidly vanishing company of soulless monsters continued their aimless wandering down the river's brim.

The five Dyaks who had escaped carried the news of the terrible creatures that had fallen upon them in the jungle, and of the awful prowess of the giant white man who led them. They told of how, armed only with a huge whip, he had been a match and more than a match for the best warriors of the tribe, and the news that they started spread rapidly down the river from one long-house to another until it reached the broad stream into which the smaller river flowed, and then it travelled up and down to the headwaters above and the ocean far below in the remarkable manner that news travels in the wild places of the world.

So it was that as Bulan advanced he found the long-houses in his path deserted, and came to the larger river and turned up toward its head without meeting with resistance or even catching a glimpse of the brown-skinned people who watched him from their hiding places in the brush.

That night they slept in the long-house near the bank of the greater stream, while its rightful occupants made the best of it in the jungle behind. The next morning found the four again on the march ere the sun had scarcely lighted the dark places of the forest, for Bulan was now sure that he was on the right trail and

that the new river that he had come to was indeed the same that he had traversed in the Prahu with Barunda.

It must have been close to noon when the young giant's ears caught the sound of the movement of some animal in the jungle a short distance to his right and away from the river. His experience with men had taught him to be wary, for it was evident that every man's hand was against him, so he determined to learn at once whether the noise he heard came from some human enemy lurking along his trail ready to spring upon him with naked parang at a moment that he was least prepared, or merely from some jungle brute.

Cautiously he threaded his way through the matted vegetation in the direction of the sound. Although a parang from the body of a vanquished Dyak hung at his side he grasped his bull whip ready in his right hand, preferring it to the less accustomed weapon of the head hunter. For a dozen yards he advanced without sighting the object of his search, but presently his efforts were rewarded by a glimpse of a reddish, hairy body, and a pair of close set, wicked eyes peering at him from behind a giant tree.

At the same instant a slight movement at one side attracted his attention to where another similar figure crouched in the underbrush, and then a third, fourth and fifth became evident about him. Bulan looked in wonderment upon the strange, man-like creatures who eyed him threateningly from every hand. They stood fully as high as the brown Dyak warriors, but their bodies were naked except for the growth of reddish hair which covered them, shading to black upon the face and hands.

The lips of the nearest were raised in an angry snarl that exposed wicked looking fighting fangs, but the beasts did not seem inclined to initiate hostilities, and as they were unarmed and evidently but engaged upon their own affairs Bulan decided to withdraw without arousing them further. As he turned to retrace his steps he found his three companions gazing in wide-eyed astonishment upon the strange new creatures which confronted them.

Number Ten was grinning broadly, while Number Three advanced cautiously toward one of the creatures, making a low guttural noise, that could only be interpreted as peaceful and conciliatory--more like a feline purr it was than anything else.

"What are you doing?" cried Bulan. "Leave them alone. They have not offered to harm us."

"They are like us," replied Number Three. "They must be our own people. I am going with them."

"And I," said Number Ten.

"And I," echoed Number Twelve. "At last we have found our own, let us all go with them and live with them, far away from the men who would beat us with great whips, and cut us with their sharp swords."

"They are not human beings," exclaimed Bulan. "We cannot live with them."

"Neither are we human beings," retorted Number Twelve. "Has not von Horn told us so manytimes?"

"If I am not now a human being," replied Bulan, "I intend to be one, and so I shall act as a human being should act. I shall not go to live with savage beasts, nor shall you. Come with me as I tell you, or you shall again taste the bull whip."

"We shall do as we please," growled Number Ten, baring his fangs. "You are not our master. We have followed you as long as we intend to. We are tired of forever walking, walking, walking through the bushes that tear our flesh and hurt us. Go and be a human being if you think you can, but do not longer interfere with us or we shall kill you," and he looked first at Number Three and then at Number Twelve for approval of his ultimatum.

Number Three nodded his grotesque and hideous head--he was so covered with long black hair that he more nearly resembled an ourang outang than a human being. Number Twelve looked doubtful.

"I think Number Ten is right," he said at last. "We are not human. We have no souls. We are things. And while you, Bulan, are beautiful, yet you are as much a soulless thing as we--that much von Horn taught us well. So I believe that it would be better were we to keep forever from the sight of men. I do not much like the thought of living with these strange, hairy monsters, but we might find a place here in the jungle where we could live alone and in peace."

"I do not want to live alone," cried Number Three. "I want a mate, and I see a beautiful one yonder now. I am going after her," and with that he again started toward a female ourang outang; but the lady bared her fangs and retreated before his advance.

"Even the beasts will have none of us," cried Number Ten angrily. "Let us take them by force then," and he started after Number Three.

"Come back!" shouted Bulan, leaping after the two deserters.

As he raised his voice there came an answering cry from a little distance ahead--a cry for help, and it was in the agonized tones of a woman's voice.



"I am coming!" shouted Bulan, and without another glance at his mutinous crew he sprang through the line of menacing ourang outangs.