

Chapter 12 - PERFIDY

On the morning that Bulan set out with his three monsters from the deserted long-house in which they had spent the night, Professor Maxon's party was speeding up the river, constantly buoyed with hope by the repeated reports of natives that the white girl had been seen passing in a war prahu.

In translating this information to Professor Maxon, von Horn habitually made it appear that the girl was in the hands of Number Thirteen, or Bulan, as they had now come to call him owing to the natives' constant use of that name in speaking of the strange, and formidable white giant who had invaded their land.

At the last long-house below the gorge, the head of which had witnessed Virginia Maxon's escape from the clutches of Ninaka and Barunda, the searching party was forced to stop owing to a sudden attack of fever which had prostrated the professor. Here they found a woman who had a strange tale to relate of a remarkable sight she had witnessed that very morning.

It seemed that she had been straining tapioca in a little stream which flowed out of the jungle at the rear of the long-house when her attention was attracted by the crashing of an animal through the bushes a few yards above her. As she looked she saw a huge MIAS PAPPAN cross the stream, bearing in his arms the dead, or unconscious form of a white-skinned girl with golden hair.

Her description of the MIAS PAPPAN was such as to half convince von Horn that she might have seen Number Three carrying Virginia Maxon, although he could not reconcile the idea with the story that the two Dyaks had told him of losing all of Bulan's monsters in the jungle.

Of course it was possible that they might have made their way over land to this point, but it seemed scarcely credible--and then, how could they have come into possession of Virginia Maxon, whom every report except this last agreed was still in the hands of Ninaka and Barunda. There was always the possibility that the natives had lied to him, and the more he questioned the Dyak woman the more firmly convinced he became that this was the fact.

The outcome of it was that von Horn finally decided to make an attempt to follow the trail of the creature that the woman had seen, and with this plan in view persuaded Muda Saffir to arrange with the chief of the long-house at which they then were to furnish him with trackers and an escort of warriors, promising them some splendid heads should they be successful in overhauling Bulan and his pack.

Professor Maxon was too ill to accompany the expedition, and von Horn set out alone with his Dyak allies. For a time after they departed Sing Lee fretted and fidgeted upon the verandah of the long-house. He wholly distrusted von Horn, and from motives of his own finally decided to follow him. The trail of the party was plainly discernible, and the Chinaman had no difficulty in following them, so that they had gone no great way before he came within hearing distance of them. Always just far enough behind to be out of sight, he kept pace with the little column as it marched through the torrid heat of the morning, until a little after noon he was startled by the sudden cry of a woman in distress, and the answering shout of a man.

The voices came from a point in the jungle a little to his right and behind him, and without waiting for the column to return, or even to ascertain if they had heard the cries, Sing ran rapidly in the direction of the alarm. For a time he saw nothing, but was guided by the snapping of twigs and the rustling of bushes ahead, where the authors of the commotion were evidently moving swiftly through the jungle.

Presently a strange sight burst upon his astonished vision. It was the hideous Number Three in mad pursuit of a female ourang outang, and an instant later he saw Number Twelve and Number Ten in battle with two males, while beyond he heard the voice of a man shouting encouragement to some one as he dashed through the jungle. It was in this last event that Sing's interest centered, for he was sure that he recognized the voice as that of Bulan, while the first cry for help which he had heard had been in a woman's voice, and Sing knew that its author could be none other than Virginia Maxon.

Those whom he pursued were moving rapidly through the jungle which was now becoming more and more open, but the Chinaman was no mean runner, and it was not long before he drew within sight of the object of his pursuit.

His first glimpse was of Bulan, running swiftly between two huge bull ourang outangs that snapped and tore at him as he bounded forward cutting and slashing at his foes with his heavy whip. Just in front of the trio was another bull bearing in his arms the unconscious form of Virginia Maxon who had fainted at the first response to her cry for help. Sing was armed with a heavy revolver but he dared not attempt to use it for fear that he might wound either Bulan or the girl, and so he was forced to remain but a passive spectator of what ensued.

Bulan, notwithstanding the running battle the two bulls were forcing upon him, was gaining steadily upon the fleeing ourang outang that was handicapped by the weight of the fair captive he bore in his huge, hairy arms. As they came into a

natural clearing in the jungle the fleeing bull glanced back to see his pursuer almost upon him, and with an angry roar turned to meet the charge.

In another instant Bulan and the three bulls were rolling and tumbling about the ground, a mass of flying fur and blood from which rose fierce and angry roars and growls, while Virginia Maxon lay quietly upon the sward where her captor had dropped her.

Sing was about to rush forward and pick her up, when he saw von Horn and his Dyaks leap into the clearing, to which they had been guided by the sounds of the chase and the encounter. The doctor halted at the sight that met his eyes--the prostrate form of the girl and the man battling with three huge bulls.

Then he gathered up Virginia Maxon, and with a sign to his Dyaks, who were thoroughly frightened at the mere sight of the white giant of whom they had heard such terrible stories, turned and hastened back in the direction from which they had come, leaving the man to what seemed must be a speedy and horrible death.

Sing Lee was astounded at the perfidy of the act. To Bulan alone was due the entire credit of having rescued Professor Maxon's daughter, and yet in the very presence of his self-sacrificing loyalty and devotion von Horn had deserted him without making the least attempt to aid him. But the wrinkled old Chinaman was made of different metal, and had started forward to assist Bulan when a heavy hand suddenly fell upon his shoulder. Looking around he saw the hideous face of Number Ten snarling into his. The bloodshot eyes of the monster were flaming with rage. He had been torn and chewed by the bull with which he had fought, and though he had finally overcome and killed the beast, a female which he had pursued had eluded him. In a frenzy of passion and blood lust aroused by his wounds, disappointment and the taste of warm blood which still smeared his lips and face, he had been seeking the female when he suddenly stumbled upon the hapless Sing.

With a roar he grasped the Chinaman as though to break him in two, but Sing was not at all inclined to give up his life without a struggle, and Number Ten was quick to learn that no mean muscles moved beneath that wrinkled, yellow hide.

There could, however, have been but one outcome to the unequal struggle had Sing not been armed with a revolver, though it was several seconds before he could bring it into play upon the great thing that shook and tossed him about as though he had been a rat in the mouth of a terrier. But suddenly there was the sharp report of a firearm, and another of Professor Maxon's unhappy experiments sank back into the nothingness from which he had conjured it.

Then Sing turned his attention to Bulan and his three savage assailants, but, except for the dead body of a bull ourang outang upon the spot where he had last seen the four struggling, there was no sign either of the white man or his antagonists; nor, though he listened attentively, could he catch the slightest sound within the jungle other than the rustling of the leaves and the raucous cries of the brilliant birds that flitted among the gorgeous blooms about him.

For half an hour he searched in every direction, but finally, fearing that he might become lost in the mazes of the unfamiliar forest he reluctantly turned his face toward the river and the long-house that sheltered his party.

Here he found Professor Maxon much improved--the safe return of Virginia having acted as a tonic upon him. The girl and her father sat with von Horn upon the verandah of the long-house as Sing clambered up the notched log that led to it from the ground. At sight of Sing's wrinkled old face Virginia Maxon sprang to her feet and ran forward to greet him, for she had been very fond of the shrewd and kindly Chinaman of whom she had seen so much during the dreary months of her imprisonment within the campong.

"Oh, Sing," she cried, "where have you been? We were all so worried to think that no sooner was one of us rescued than another became lost."

"Sing takee walk, Linee, las all," said the grinning Chinaman. "Velly glad see Linee black 'gain," and that was all that Sing Lee had to say of the adventures through which he had just passed, and the strange sights that he had seen.

Again and again the girl and von Horn narrated the stirring scenes of the day, the latter being compelled to repeat all that had transpired from the moment that he had heard Virginia's cry, though it was apparent that he only consented to speak of his part in her rescue under the most considerable urging. Very pretty modesty, thought Sing when he had heard the doctor's version of the affair.

"You see," said von Horn, "when I reached the spot Number Three, the brute that you thought was an ape, had just turned you over to Number Thirteen, or, as the natives now call him, Bulan. You were then in a faint, and when I attacked Bulan he dropped you to defend himself. I had expected a bitter fight from him after the wild tales the natives have been telling of his ferocity, but it was soon evident that he is an arrant coward, for I did not even have to fire my revolver--a few thumps with the butt of it upon his brainless skull sent him howling into the jungle with his pack at his heels."

"How fortunate it is, my dear doctor," said Professor Maxon, "that you were bright enough to think of trailing the miscreant into the jungle. But for that Virginia

would still be in his clutches and by this time he would have been beyond all hope of capture. How can we ever repay you, dear friend?"

"That you were generous enough to arrange when we first embarked upon the search for your daughter," replied von Horn.

"Just so, just so," said the professor, but a shade of trouble tinged the expression of his face, and a moment later he arose, saying that he felt weak and tired and would go to his sleeping room and lie down for a while. The fact was that Professor Maxon regretted the promise he had made von Horn relative to his daughter.

Once before he had made plans for her marriage only to regret them later; he hoped that he had made no mistake this time, but he realized that it had scarcely been fair to Virginia to promise her to his assistant without first obtaining her consent. Yet a promise was a promise, and, again, was it not true that but for von Horn she would have been dead or worse than dead in a short time had she not been rescued from the clutches of the soulless Bulan? Thus did the old man justify his action, and clinch the determination that he had before reached to compel Virginia to wed von Horn should she, from some incomprehensible motive, demur. Yet he hoped that the girl would make it easy, by accepting voluntarily the man who had saved her life.

Left alone, or as he thought alone, with the girl in the growing shadows of the evening, von Horn thought the moment propitious for renewing his suit. He did not consider the natives squatting about them as of sufficient consequence to consider, since they would not understand the language in which he addressed Virginia, and in the dusk he failed to note that Sing squatted with the Dyaks, close behind them.

"Virginia," he commenced, after an interval of silence, "often before have I broached the subject nearest to my heart, yet never have you given me much encouragement. Can you not feel for the man who would gladly give his life for you, sufficient affection to permit you to make him the happiest man in the world? I do not ask for all your love at first--that will come later. Just give me the right to cherish and protect you. Say that you will be my wife, Virginia, and we need have no more fears that the strange vagaries of your father's mind can ever again jeopardize your life or your happiness as they have in the past."

"I feel that I owe you my life," replied the girl in a quiet voice, "and while I am now positive that my father has entirely regained his sanity, and looks with as great abhorrence upon the terrible fate he planned for me as I myself, I cannot forget the debt of gratitude which belongs to you."

"At the same time I do not wish to be the means of making you unhappy, as surely would be the result were I to marry you without love. Let us wait until I know myself better. Though you have spoken to me of the matter before, I realize now that I never have made any effort to determine whether or not I really can love you. There is time enough before we reach civilization, if ever we are fortunate enough to do so at all. Will you not be as generous as you are brave, and give me a few days before I must make you a final answer?"

With Professor Maxon's solemn promise to insure his ultimate success von Horn was very gentle and gracious in deferring to the girl's wishes. The girl for her part could not put from her mind the disappointment she had felt when she discovered that her rescuer was von Horn, and not the handsome young giant whom she had been positive was in close pursuit of her abductors.

When Number Thirteen had been mentioned she had always pictured him as a hideous monster, similar to the creature that had seized her in the jungle beside the encampment that first day she had seen the mysterious stranger, of whom she could obtain no information either from her father or von Horn. When she had recently insisted that the same man had been at the head of her father's creatures in an attempt to rescue her, both von Horn and Professor Maxon scoffed at the idea, until at last she was convinced that the fright and the firelight had conspired to conjure in her brain the likeness of one who was linked by memory to another time of danger and despair.

Virginia could not understand why it was that the face of the stranger persisted in obtruding itself in her memory. That the man was unusually good looking was undeniable, but she had known many good looking men, nor was she especially impressionable to mere superficial beauty. No words had passed between them on the occasion of their first meeting, so it could have been nothing that he said which caused the memory of him to cling so tenaciously in her mind.

What was it then? Was it the memory of the moments that she had lain in his strong arms--was it the shadow of the sweet, warm glow that had suffused her as his eyes had caught hers upon his face?

The thing was tantalizing--it was annoying. The girl blushed in mortification at the very thought that she could cling so resolutely to the memory of a total stranger, and--still greater humiliation--long in the secret depths of her soul to see him again.

She was angry with herself, but the more she tried to forget the young giant who had come into her life for so brief an instant, the more she speculated upon his identity and the strange fate that had brought him to their little, savage island

only to snatch him away again as mysteriously as he had come, the less was the approval with which she looked upon the suit of Doctor von Horn.

Von Horn had left her, and strolled down to the river. Finally Virginia arose to seek the crude couch which had been spread for her in one of the sleeping rooms of the long-house. As she passed a group of natives squatted nearby one of the number arose and approached her, and as she halted, half in fright, a low voice whispered:

"Looke out, Linee, dloctor Hornee velly bad man."

"Why, Sing!" exclaimed Virginia. "What in the world do you mean by saying such a thing as that?"

"Never mind, Linee; you always good to old Sing. Sing no likee see you sadee. Dloctor Hornee velly bad man, las allee," and without another word the Chinaman turned and walked away.